

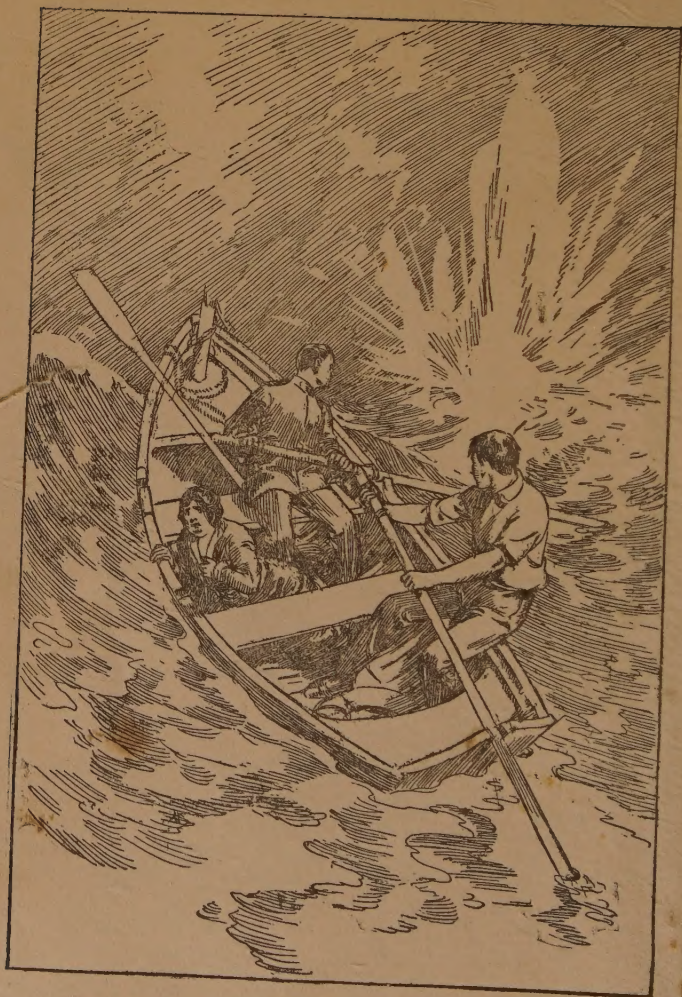
THE BATTLESHIP BOYS WITH THE ADRIATIC CHASERS

FRANK GEE PATCHIN



THE
BATTLESHIP
BOYS
SERIES





Troubles Come Fast.

Frontispiece

The Battleship Boys

With the

Adriatic Chasers

OR

Blocking the Trail of the Undersea
Raiders

By

FRANK GEE PATCHIN

Author of The Battleship Boys at Sea, The Battleship Boys' First
Step Upward, The Battleship Boys in Foreign Service,
The Battleship Boys in the Tropics, The Battleship Boys Under Fire, The Battleship
Boys in the Wardroom, Etc.

Illustrated

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The Battleship Boys With the Adriatic Chasers

CHAPTER I

FACING THE HUN PERIL AT SEA

“GOOD morning, Mate.” Dan Davis had run up the sea ladder of the liner “Oceanica” and stepped aboard, while the ship was still under slow headway. He turned toward the stern and saluted the British ensign, after which Dan and his companion shook hands cordially with the chief officer, Mr. Burns. Dan glanced over the side where their dunnage was being hoisted aboard.

“That all your gear, sir?” questioned the chief officer.

“Not all, but it’s all you gave us time to collect. This naval life is a continuous moving-picture show,” answered Sam Hickey. “Where do we pipe down?”

“I have not heard, gentlemen. Make yourselves comfortable on deck for a short time. After we pass Sandy Hook, Captain Grant,

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master of the ship, wishes to see you on the bridge."

Dan and Sam saluted, then turned their glances astern, where the Battleship "Long Island," which they had just left, was slowly steaming up the harbor.

"It seems like leaving a dear friend," said Sam.

"We are leaving many of them there," replied Lieutenant Davis, with a wave of the hand toward the battleship. "And we are leaving the only home we have known in some years. That is the life of those whose duty calls them to the pathless sea. Suppose we look about a little."

The two lieutenants of Uncle Sam's navy strolled aft, the ship's company observing them with interest, for these young officers just assigned to war duty in Europe were splendid types of America's best. They were in full uniform because they were as fully on duty as if they were on the deck of their beloved Battleship "Long Island." The passenger list was a large one, despite the danger of ocean travel in these days of relentless submarine warfare. There were quite a number of British civilians on board, a few Americans, but no troops, as America had not yet begun to send troops abroad.

An hour later the ship had dropped her pilot and it was then that Captain Grant sent a messenger for the two young naval officers.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, gentlemen," greeted the captain. "I am glad to see you. While you were coming over to us I had a wireless from your captain regarding you." The skipper's eyes narrowed in a twinkle.

"May I ask what the nature of Captain Farnham's communication was?" questioned Dan Davis.

Captain Grant stroked his chin reflectively.

"Captain Farnham said we were in for it on this voyage. He said that the presence of Lieutenants Davis and Hickey on board was a forerunner of trouble, that trouble always sailed hand in hand with them."

"A fine recommendation, I must say," exclaimed the red-headed Sam Hickey.

"Are you carrying any orders for us?" questioned Dan.

"None, except that we were ordered to slow down and pick you up down the harbor. You are unattached?"

"It seems so, for the time being," replied Davis.

"I have assigned one of my cabins on the bridge deck to you, gentlemen. Make yourselves thoroughly at home. Anything that you may

wish will be at your disposal. You may have your meals served in your cabin if you prefer and——”

“Thank you, but I think that we should prefer to eat in the saloon. Dining alone becomes monotonous,” returned Lieutenant Davis with a smile. “If you have need of extra watch officers during the voyage, we shall be glad to serve our tricks.”

“Thank you, I’ll remember that. When we get into the danger zone I shall take you at your word. We shall have need of every trained pair of eyes on board. We have been fortunate thus far, but——” The captain did not complete the sentence. Instead he gazed off to the horizon where here and there a giant whitecap momentarily broke the sky line. “Come with me and I will show you your quarters.”

As the readers of this series will recall, only a few short years ago Dan Davis and Sam Hickey had entered the navy as raw recruits, as related in “THE BATTLESHIP BOYS AT SEA.” At the Naval Station at Newport they had distinguished themselves by their alertness and attention to duty, and from the very start of their careers had sharply attracted the attention of their superiors. After completing their course at the Naval Training Station they were assigned to the Battleship “Long Island,” on

which ship they had served, working their way upward from one grade to another, until now both were lieutenants of the line, Dan a senior and Sam a junior lieutenant.

In "THE BATTLESHIP BOYS' FIRST STEP UPWARD" it is well remembered how the two lads went to the aid of a sinking ship, on which Dan Davis was left alone and was shelled by the guns of his own ship until the decks were shot from under him. Then followed the winning of the fleet cup race, due to Dan's skillful work, which placed him high in the estimation of his superiors and his shipmates.

In "THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN FOREIGN SERVICE" they saw a great deal of other lands in which they had many thrilling experiences. Their visit to the Pyramids of Egypt is as fresh in the minds of the reader, as it surely is in those of Dan Davis and Sam Hickey. On this cruise Dan got his step to the grade of chief petty officer, with the rating of chief turret captain, and with a considerable increase in salary.

The story of their first really active service is related in the next volume entitled "THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN THE TROPICS." Dan Davis's bull fight in Mexico was one of the most thrilling incidents of his career. How he saved the pretty Spanish dancer from the horns of the maddened fighting bull; how later he upheld the

flag of his country and punished two revolutionary leaders who had insulted the flag; how he captured a filibuster after shooting the boat's pilot house nearly all away, and how in the end he captured the revolutionary leader and effectually put an end to the revolution, are all still matters of keen memory among those who have followed the careers of these two sterling young Americans.

In "THE BATTLESHIP BOYS UNDER FIRE" Dan and Sam performed deeds of valor that brought its reward from Washington. With a small body of men Dan and Sam struck off into the wilds of China on their way to the rescue of a besieged mission. In this campaign, it will be recalled how Dan bore an unconscious officer on his back over miles of rough country, through terrific heat in order to secure for him medical attention whereby his life might be saved. Reaching the scene of the Boxer uprising, Dan and his band of plucky followers rescued the missionaries, despite the thousands of desperate Chinese who would take their lives.

Upon their safe return to their ship the two lads were promoted, having previously passed their examinations for a higher grade. Dan was elevated to the rank of warrant officer, while Sam became a chief petty officer.

Dan Davis, in "THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN THE

WARDROOM," returned to his ship a lieutenant of the line, now entitled to mess with the officers in the wardroom, which he did with more timidity than he would feel in facing the twelve-inch guns of the "Long Island."

It will be recalled how, upon going to the assistance of a disabled ship Dan and Sam became lost in a fog and roamed the seas in the captain's motor boat all night long, bringing up in the early morning on an unfamiliar island, which later proved to belong to the Lower Andaman group.

Rescued, by their shipmates from the battleship, Dan and Sam returned to the "Long Island" and sailed away toward home. Reaching New York harbor they were ordered to transfer to the passenger liner "Oceanica" and sail for Europe to do their bit in the great war with Germany.

At mess that first day on the liner they found themselves entertained by the chatter of the passengers, the principal topic discussed being submarines. Across the table from the Battleship Boys sat a fat and very red-faced woman. Her name was Mrs. Renwick, and she was on her way to London to be at the bedside of her husband, Silas Renwick, who had been taken ill there while making contracts with the British government. Mr. Renwick was a lard packer,

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as most of the passengers knew before the meal came to an end.

“Do you really think, young man, that there is danger of this ship being torpedoed?” she demanded, fixing her large eyes on Sam Hickey. “There is, madam,” replied Sam courteously.

“Then why doesn’t the British government stop them? Why should such things be permitted?”

“I have no doubt that the British government would be very glad to do so. They would be glad to pay you a large sum of money if you could tell them how to do so. We must take our chances just the same as passengers on other ships are doing. If we play with fire we must not complain too bitterly if we get our fingers burned, which isn’t to be construed as excusing the Hun, by any means.”

Mrs. Renwick uttered a moan and, leaning back, closed her eyes. The Battleship Boys engaged in conversation with other passengers and, for the rest of the meal, the lard packer’s wife found opportunity only to get in a word edgewise here and there.

The days from that on, however, passed pleasantly enough for Dan and Sam between writing letters to friends at home and pacing the bridge.

On the fifth day the “Oceanica” neared the

western edge of the submarine zone. From then on the British naval gun crews slept by their guns, when they slept at all. Double watches were set and every precaution was taken to prevent a Hun surprise in the shape of a torpedo fired at the steamer. Dan and Sam stood bridge watch together in the middle watch during the first night in the danger zone. Their keenness in making observations over the dark waters at night was of great assistance to the master of the "Oceanica," and the work was a pleasure to the two young naval officers, who preferred to be employed rather than to be inactive.

By now Dan and Sam knew the ship almost as well as her own master himself. They knew the tricks of her rudder, the capabilities of her engines and her various strong and weak points.

"What do you think of her?" questioned Dan, as he and Sam were leaning over the bridge rail one bright, sunshiny afternoon.

"Tub," answered the red-headed boy briefly but to the point.

"She is old, Sam."

"So is our admiral, but his plates and ribs are as good as the day they were put in him, and his engines—well, they can handle more steam than those of the youngest ensign in the Atlantic fleet."

Dan laughed heartily.

"I reckon the admiral would feel complimented were he to hear you," chuckled Lieutenant Davis. "I see a trail of smoke off the starboard bow."

"Eh?" Sam focused his glasses on the slender ribbon of smoke. "Sure thing."

"What do you make of her?"

"Smoke," answered Hickey succinctly.

"Lookout, there!" hailed Lieutenant Davis, who commanded the bridge this afternoon, to the lookout in the crow's nest. "What do you see?"

"Steamer two points off the starboard bow, sir."

"I thought it was about time you discovered her. Keep watch and report more promptly, please."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"We are gaining on that fellow, whoever he is," announced Dan some time later. "She appears to be drawing in. Perhaps she is changing her course to a more northerly one."

"Cargo boat," declared Sam. "I see her cargo cranes. If she had a few more of them I might take her for a collier."

"Take nothing for granted in these times. No matter what clothes a vessel may wear, suspect her until you find out that she is all right

—then take another look for luck. I'm going up to the masthead to have a look through the long telescope. You keep bridge watch, and a sharp lookout."

The chief officer observing Davis at the masthead, hurried to the bridge. The captain was taking his afternoon nap, for he would be up all night almost every night now until the ship was safely at her landing stage in Liverpool. Dan joined the chief officer on the bridge a short time afterwards.

"Get a scare?" asked Mr. Burns, grinning broadly.

"Not yet."

"I could have told you she is a freighter. It's the 'Wilmot Castle' and she's bound for Bristol."

"Sure of that?"

"I know it. Why?"

"Oh, if that is so the 'Wilmot Castle' must have added another stack since last I saw her. Besides, if I remember her rightly the 'Wilmot Castle' has flush decks. This fellow has two stacks and two well decks. I think that you had better take another peep, Mr. Burns." Dan laughed good-naturedly.

The chief officer took the telescope and gave the stranger a long, careful scrutiny.

"You are right, Lieutenant. It isn't the

‘Wilmot Castle,’ but she is a freighter and you don’t need to bother about her. I will be up later when she’s abeam, and have another look.”

“Thank you, Mr. Burns.” After the chief officer had gone below Sam cocked an eye at his companion.

“One of those fellows who takes things for granted, eh, Dan?”

Lieutenant Davis nodded.

“She looks all right, but I am going to watch her closely just the same.”

The “Oceanica” was gaining on the stranger rather too rapidly, Dan thought. Still the other fellow, judging from the smoke, was cleaning grates, which would mean that for the time being one of the distant ship’s boilers was out of commission.

The steamer came gradually into fuller view, Dan and Sam watching her narrowly, not forgetting to keep wary eyes on other parts of the sea. Lieutenant Davis suddenly reached for his pocket whistle and blew three sharp, shrill blasts, which summoned a quartermaster.

“Call the captain at once,” commanded the lieutenant.

The captain responded promptly.

“That freighter yonder. I wish you would look her over, sir,” requested Dan.

“She looks all right. What is wrong about

her?" questioned the master after a brief look at the cargo boat.

"Too big a crew on her decks."

"Why, Lieutenant, there aren't a dozen men in sight," answered Captain Grant.

"What?" Dan focused his glasses on the stranger. "You are right, sir. However, I'll stake my reputation that there were a hundred when first I made out her deck. Suppose you ask who she is, if I may so suggest."

A string of international code flags broke out from the signal halyard of the "Oceanica." The answer came quickly, "'Dundee' from Newport News for Glasgow. Who are you?"

"'Oceanica,' New York to Liverpool with mail and passengers."

"That settles it, I guess," announced the captain, and Dan was forced to bow to the decision of the ship's commander. The stranger was now just off the starboard bow and would soon be abeam.

Dan, sweeping the sea to port, chanced to look into the water near the ship, and what he saw there gave him the start of his life. For a second or so he seemed to lose the power of action or speech. To Dan the interval of helplessness seemed hours instead of seconds before he found himself.

Less than five hundred feet to port, in the

deep trough of the sea, there suddenly appeared the red war-head of a torpedo. Lieutenant Davis recognized that red-headed projectile on the instant. He knew what its presence there meant. From its position and speed Dan calculated that the torpedo would strike the "Oceanica" some little distance abaft the bridge.

"Starboard!" The word came out with such explosive force as to startle the quartermaster at the wheel and, for a few precious seconds, to leave him incapable of action. But Sam Hickey was there. Sam gave the quartermaster a violent shove and spun the wheel about to starboard, which put the steamer's bow sharply to port. The turn that the "Oceanica" made was so violent that many passengers in the saloon were left with their laps full of food, while dishes and glassware went crashing to the floor.

Then a terrifying crash shook the vessel from bow to stern. Panic instantly seized upon the passengers, who ran shouting to the deck, with Mrs. Renwick's screams heard above all the rest.

CHAPTER II

THE FOX OF THE SEA

“**T**ORPEDOED!” was the cry on every lip that was able to utter a sound.

Captain Grant, who had been leaning over the starboard bridge rail observing the cargo boat, seemed stunned for the moment. Then he too found himself and began giving his orders.

Lieutenants Davis and Hickey were perfectly calm, but keenly alert. They were searching for the tell-tale periscope of the submarine that had fired the torpedo.

“There she is! Three points off the port quarter,” shouted Davis.

The British gunners had already spotted the periscope rising from the water, and the bow and stern four-inch guns were cracking away. The first shot missed by a hundred yards; the second went high over the submarine, the third going so far astern that watching eyes barely saw it strike the water.

“Some shooting,” grumbled Hickey. “I could do better with a pop gun and a wad of paper.”

"They are excited. Come below, we are needed there. What is that fellow doing?" Dan referred to the freighter "Dundee" that was manoeuvring into position abeam of them.

"Stand by until we see how badly we are hit," signalled Captain Grant.

"Understand," answered the fluttering acknowledgment flag from the freighter.

While all this taking place, the chief officer and the engineer had been making a hurried survey of the damage done by the torpedo, while other officers were swinging the life boats out loaded with passengers ready to lower away if found to be necessary.

The chief officer soon reported that the "Oceanica" was in no immediate danger of sinking, for the quick action of the young American naval officer had undoubtedly saved the ship. The torpedo had hit the port quarter a glancing blow, opening a large hole in the stern, but the bulkhead doors having been promptly closed, the water was confined to one compartment.

In the meantime the submarine had not been idle. The Huns were letting loose with their guns, and showing superior marksmanship. One shell tore through the liner's bridge, just after Dan and Sam had descended to the deck,

wrecking the binnacle and compass and carrying away part of the forward rail.

Dan stepped up to the gunner in charge of the bow gun on the "Oceanica."

"May I try a shot at her, my man?" he asked.

"Certainly, sir."

Dan called the range, a gunner sighted the piece and Dan, as the "Oceanica" rose on a swell, let go. There followed a spurt of water close by the submarine and it was seen that its periscope had been hit about half way down, and was bent over at a dangerous angle, but a second periscope, on the same craft, was as yet untouched.

The damaged periscope was quickly cut away and thrown overboard, the submarine's guns in the meantime shooting at the liner with renewed vigor. Then the undersea boat suddenly submerged and disappeared. It was evident that its commander did not like the marksmanship of the Battleship Boy, who had registered two more distinct, though glancing hits.

Captain Grant ordered the "Oceanica" to get under way, the ship having been stopped after the torpedo hit her. The vessel moved, under reduced headway, and began to zigzag. Her life boats were swung inboard, but the passengers were ordered to stand by ready to disembark, should the submarine make further

attempts to sink the liner.

Dan and Sam had returned to the damaged bridge, both lads now training their glasses on the "Dundee."

"Look at that fellow!" exclaimed Dan.

The cargo boat had broken out from her signal halyards the international code letters, "G. T. E.," which meant, "Heave to and I'll send a boat."

"Thank you. We do not need assistance," replied Captain Grant.

"Heave to!" came the peremptory command.

"What for?"

"Heave to!"

"Here's more trouble," cried Lieutenant Davis. "Captain, that fellow means mischief. Look at that, will you!"

Both the cargo boat's port bulwarks were dropped outward, uncovering two six-inch guns. At the same moment the Imperial German Naval Ensign was run up at her jackstaff forward.

"Go—o—o—ood night!" exclaimed the red-headed Sam Hickey. "Now we surely are in for it."

"The fiends!" cried Dan Davis.

A puff of smoke now burst from the forward six-inch gun. There followed a terrific crash on board the "Oceanica" as a six-inch projec-

tile tore through the forecastle deck. It had been aimed high. The forecastle was left a wreck, the cargo winch was pretty well shot away and the bows of the ship were left a tangled mass of steel, broken woodwork and twisted cable.

"Why don't we shoot?" groaned Hickey. "Give them a round down there, you gunners."

"No, no, Sam," interposed Lieutenant Davis. "You mustn't give orders. Captain Grant is in command. Besides, you must remember that we have passengers on board and, if we resist, that fellow will sink us with all on board. I _____,"

His words were cut short by the most terrific crash that he had ever heard. The bridge crumpled up and went down in a mass of tangled wreckage, carrying the Battleship Boys down with it. Captain Grant, hurled clear of the bridge rail as the shell struck, was thrown to the deck below and left bruised and unconscious.

The passengers once more were thrown into panic. They were running back and forth across the decks and some, beside themselves with fear, jumped into the sea. It was a scene of terror, which the ship's officers seemed powerless to quell.

But what of the Battleship Boys down there

in the wreckage of the bridge? Both had been stunned, but they collected their wits and by sheer force of will regained their senses.

"Sam," called Dan. "Are you hurt?"

"No, but I'm buried alive. How are you heading?"

"Dead reckoning. I don't know. Can you get out?"

"No, I'm pinned down. There goes that fellow with his six-inch again. I guess he is going to sink us."

"The ship is listing heavily," gasped Dan, struggling to free himself from the weight that held him down. "The coward! I had an intuition the moment I looked at that ship that there was something wrong about it. It's a raider, Sam."

"You don't have to tell me that," grumbled Hickey. "Oh, for the 'Long Island' for just five minutes. Our boys would make hash of that cowardly Hun."

"I'm free, Sam," shouted Davis. "I'll help you."

Five minutes later Dan had his companion out. Their clothing was torn, and they were bleeding and a little pale, but their eyes burned with a fire that reflected their deep resentment at the barbarity of the Hun commander.

Captain Grant had come to himself and was doing his best to quell the panic, but with little success. Lieutenant Davis hurried below just as another shell tore through the ship amidships, killing several passengers and one under officer. He snatched up his holster and ammunition belt, then going to Hickey's suit case took the red-headed boy's revolver and dashed back to the deck.

The passengers were still screaming, and were crowding the boats that were now outboard. Dan thrust a revolver into Hickey's hand, then forced his way to the rail of the ship, followed by Sam.

"Back, all of you! Women into the boats first! I'll shoot the man who tries to enter a boat before ordered to do so."

"I shall go with this lady," shouted a passenger, pushing his way through the mass of human beings and starting to clamber into a life boat. Hickey caught the man by the collar and hurled him flat on his back.

"Next time you'll get it harder," threatened the Battleship Boy.

The passengers drew back a little out of reach of the red-headed boy.

Lieutenant Davis, in the meantime, was holding back the crowd with his revolver and gradually getting order out of the wild confusion.

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His face was flushed, but more from anger at the inhumanity of the German raider's captain than from any excitement due to their own peril. Neither lad had given a thought to his own safety.

"We're coming aboard. At the first hostile move we shall sweep you with our machine-gun fire," was the signal made with the international flags.

Dan and Sam read the signals out of the corners of their eyes, and a satirical smile played about the lips of Lieutenant Davis.

"Fine shape we are in to offer resistance," muttered Sam Hickey. "There's another signal."

"Abandon ship and come aboard. Lose no time," signalled the raider.

The liner's boats were quickly loaded and lowered away. Captain Grant gave the life boat oarsmen orders to pull over to the raider and declared that he with his officers would take the last boat.

"When you go, we shall go," answered Dan.

Captain Grant saluted and waited for the arrival of the boarders from the raider. They soon arrived in charge of a spruce, sharp-eyed German under-lieutenant. He took possession of the ship's papers and such of her instruments as had not been destroyed. Next he di-

rected his men to take such food and other supplies as were needed by the raider. Observing that Dan and Sam were U. S. Naval officers, the under-lieutenant saluted, which salute the Battleship Boys returned punctiliously, but with reluctance. They did not find it in their hearts to salute an officer who had been a party to the murder of defenseless passengers.

"What ship is that?" questioned Dan, indicating the supposed "Dundee."

"His Majesty's ship 'Fox,'" answered the lieutenant.

"Oh!" Dan was enlightened now. He had heard of the depredations of this pirate of the Atlantic, whose deeds were only equaled by those of the raider "Wolf" on the Pacific.

"I see you wear side arms. I'll take them," ordered the German sharply. "You are prisoners of war."

The Battleship Boys handed over their weapons without comment and, at the order of the German lieutenant, went down the sea ladder and dropped into one of the raider's boats. It was then that they saw that the "Oceanica" was settling fast. Captain Grant, acting upon orders, soon followed them over the side. Other boats that had come over from the raider were being rapidly loaded with provisions, ammunition and china, for the "Fox" evidently

had not enough dishes to accommodate her now increasing ship's company.

The raider's boats pulled away rapidly, and a few moments later a loud explosion rent the air, and a burst of flame shot up through the liner's decks. The explosion broke her back and the ship sank rapidly. Before the boats had reached the raider the "Oceanica" was only a memory, save for the floating wreckage.

Captain Grant buried his head in his hands when the explosion occurred from the bombs that the Germans had planted below decks.

Reaching the side of the raider the Battleship Boys climbed the sea ladder and stepped to the deck of the "Fox," as prisoners of war, and perhaps for the duration of the war. This was the disheartening thought in the mind of each.

CHAPTER III

PRISONERS OF WAR

"TWO American naval officers, sir," announced the lieutenant to the captain of the "Fox."

"Take them below. I will see them soon."

Dan and Sam were conducted to a cabin be-

low decks and ordered to remain there. The cabin door was not locked, but they knew very well that it was guarded by a sentry.

"Fine kettle of fish," ejaculated Hickey.

"A whole cargo of them," agreed Dan Davis.

"What are we going to do about it, Dan?"

"The decision doesn't appear to be up to us, Samuel."

"What do you think they will do with us?"

"I'll tell you, Sam—they are going to keep us on board this ship until they can either transfer us to some other raider going home to Germany, or until some British or American warship comes along and shoots the deck from under us. It is a fine outlook either way you look at it. We are prisoners of war and we are likely to spend the rest of our days, while the war lasts, in a German prison camp."

"Not if my name is Sam Hickey," growled the red-headed boy. "I——"

An orderly opened the cabin door and beckoned to them. Dan nodded significantly to his companion, as the two stepped out into the corridor and followed the orderly.

"The inquisition is about to begin," announced Dan. Sam's lips tightened perceptibly.

The boys were conducted to the bridge deck, and forward to the quarters of Captain Erich, master of the "Fox." As they entered he was

sitting at his desk writing. Dan and Sam remained standing, the master ignoring their presence. Their faces were flushed, and Sam's hair actually appeared to be getting redder with the seconds. Finally Captain Erich swung around in his chair and fixed his keen gray eyes on the faces of his two guests.

The master of the "Fox" was a man perhaps forty years old, of moderate height, slim and wiry. He was immaculate in dress, incisive in speech and cold in manner as a blade of tempered steel, and apparently as polished when he chose to be. He glanced from the faces of his guests to the under-lieutenant, who sat just back of Sam and Dan with a pad of paper before him.

"Officers of the United States Navy, I take it?" said the captain coldly.

"Yes, sir," answered Lieutenant Davis.

"Rank?"

"Lieutenants."

"What ship?"

"I decline to answer," replied Dan. Hickey nodded his approval.

"What were you doing aboard the 'Oceanica?'"

"I decline to answer."

"What was your last assignment previous to shipping on the 'Oceanica?'"

"I decline to answer."

"Now, Lieutenant, it is proper that I tell you that your answers may have considerable bearing on my future disposition of you. You understand that both of you are prisoners of war?"

Dan nodded, his eyes never leaving the face of his inquisitor.

"The questions I put to you are more for the sake of my own self-preservation than for other reasons. Your answers should be made in the same spirit. Is your navy department aware that the 'Fox' is operating in the Atlantic Ocean?"

"As to that I have no information, sir. It is reasonable to suppose that it does know."

"Roughly speaking, how large a fleet has your country in the Atlantic at the present moment—what tonnage should you say?"

"I do not know, sir, nor do I think it likely that I should tell you if I did know."

"You have been on a recent cruise in these waters?"

"I decline to answer."

"Put the same answer down to all your questions and save time, why don't you?" blurted out Sam Hickey. Hickey never quailed under the cold glance that the captain fixed on him.

"What is the present disposition of your destroyers?"

"I have no definite information on that subject, sir."

"How long have you gentlemen been in your present grade?"

"I decline to answer."

"Your country is making a terrible blunder in going to war with the Imperial government. Germany is going to win this war and——"

"There's something to be said on both sides of that question, Captain," interjected Hickey. "When America once gets under way there's going to be a day of reckoning for your Imperial master for dastardly deeds such as we have witnessed this day. I hope it falls to my lot to treat this ship as you treated the 'Oceonica.' If I should chance to be in command of a ship that met up with you, there would be something doing, Captain Erich."

Sam's red head of hair fairly bristled. Dan gave him a warning glance.

"You will not be in that position in this war, Lieutenant," replied the captain smiling. "A German prison camp for the rest of the war is about the best you can look forward to."

"Not if I know it," retorted Sam heatedly. "No German prison pen can keep us shut up for very long."

“Take them away,” ordered Captain Erich severely. “You will be glad to talk before I have finished with you, and you will be deprived of your liberty until I find you in a more communicative frame of mind. That’s all. But wait. One more question—when did you last see Captain Farnham?”

Instead of flushing, Dan Davis laughed.

“You must have a Navy Register on board this ship. However, Navy Registers are not always the last word in naval intelligence. Do what you will, Captain, in no circumstances will either of us give you any information that can be of the slightest benefit to you or your cause.” Dan saluted and turned to follow the orderly to their cabin.

Not wholly to their surprise, they did not halt at the berth deck, but descended to a still lower deck, using their eyes as they went. They observed that, in addition to the two six-inch guns in the forward well, the “Fox” carried two four-inch guns forward and two aft. The bulwarks or solid rails at these guns were fitted with hinges and spring catches so that by one blow of a hammer they dropped down, thus giving the guns room for action. While the bulwarks were in place no one on board another ship could see the guns.

The “Fox” was further armed with four tor-

pedo tubes, two forward and two aft on the well decks. Those forward were known as "Red Heads," very effective for short distances, while the after torpedoes were "Manlichers," employed principally for long-distance work. Up on the boat deck, well screened, were two machine guns, one forward and one aft, the two controlling the decks, for use in case the prisoners revolted.

The deck to which the young American officers were conducted was well below the water line. So far as they could observe there were no prisoners down there, though there were many on board, but no communication with these had been possible thus far. Dan and Sam were then thrust into a dark inside cabin, shut in with a grated door, which was locked behind them.

"In the brig!" exclaimed Hickey. "Isn't that just like a Hun?"

"We can expect nothing better," answered Dan. "We are in the hands of the Germans, but we shall get away from them even if we have to swim for it."

"Fine wet prospect ahead of us, Dan," answered Hickey. "I almost hope an American warship gets after this fellow even if he sinks us. I think I should be willing to go down if I could see this raider sunk."

"Same here," agreed Dan.

The boys slept on the floor of the brig that night, with no other sound than the swish of the water as the raider slipped through the seas.

On the following morning, a steward brought in their breakfast. This consisted of a sea biscuit apiece and two cups of water. They munched the biscuits solemnly.

"Have another egg on toast," urged Sam.

"Thank you, no," answered Dan. "Eggs in the morning never did agree with me." Then both laughed heartily. "I think I will take a stroll. Coming along?"

"Stroll? Yes, a fine chance we shall have for a stroll. What——"

Dan had opened the grated door and stepped out into the corridor, to the amazement of his companion.

"How did you know that door was not locked?" demanded Hickey in a puzzled tone.

"I observed that the steward neglected to lock it when he went out. Use your eyes, Sam."

"Well, I never. There comes that orderly. Back to the dungeon for us."

Instead, the orderly, looking somewhat surprised to see the prisoners in the corridor, beckoned them to follow him. He conducted them up to the deck.

"Told you I was going to take a stroll," said Davis.

"We are not going far," observed Hickey.

"To the captain's quarters then back to our dungeon," answered Dan laconically.

Dan was right. The Battleship Boys were conducted to the same quarters and faced the same conditions as on the previous evening, except that the captain was alone. This time, there was a new light in the eyes of Captain Erich. He was standing, with one hand resting lightly on his desk awaiting them.

"Are you prepared to answer my questions this morning?" he demanded harshly.

"We can answer them only in the same way that we did yesterday," replied Davis.

"You refuse to give me the information?"

"I do."

"Mr. Hickey, I suppose your answer is the same?" he demanded, turning his eyes on the red-headed Sam.

"It is."

"You prefer, I take it, to remain in the brig until such time as I may find it convenient to transfer you to another ship for Germany, living on sea biscuit and water?"

"Our preferences apparently have nothing to do with the situation," answered Lieutenant Davis.

"I have a proposal to make to you. There are ships of your own country in our wireless zone. Though it is not good judgment for me to do so, if you will answer my questions freely and truthfully, I will notify one of your ships, a merchantman, of course, that you are about to leave your present berth, giving the position of this ship. Then I will put you over in a life boat, rationed for several days, and you will be picked up. The weather is good and you know how to handle a boat. It is a hazardous thing for me to do, but I am willing to take the chance. What do you say?"

"This," answered Dan Davis, taking a forward step, "nothing that you could offer us in the way of personal safety, nothing that you could offer us in the way of reward would tempt us to betray our country. You should know better than to ask it."

"You are fools!" answered the German captain. "I give you one minute to change your mind!" The captain snatched a revolver from his desk and examining it, inserted a clip, then leveled it at the Battleship Boys.

"Lieutenant Davis, I have given you every opportunity to save yourselves, and without sacrificing what you are pleased to consider your honor. I have offered you freedom for certain trivial information that cannot possibly

work harm to your own country. I have asked it merely that——”

“Merely that you may go on with your pirate work and sink helpless merchant ships and murder American citizens. I know you and all your kind. I fear you not at all. You are a coward at heart, as well as an assassin. Any man who would do what I saw you do yesterday is a coward and a murderer.”

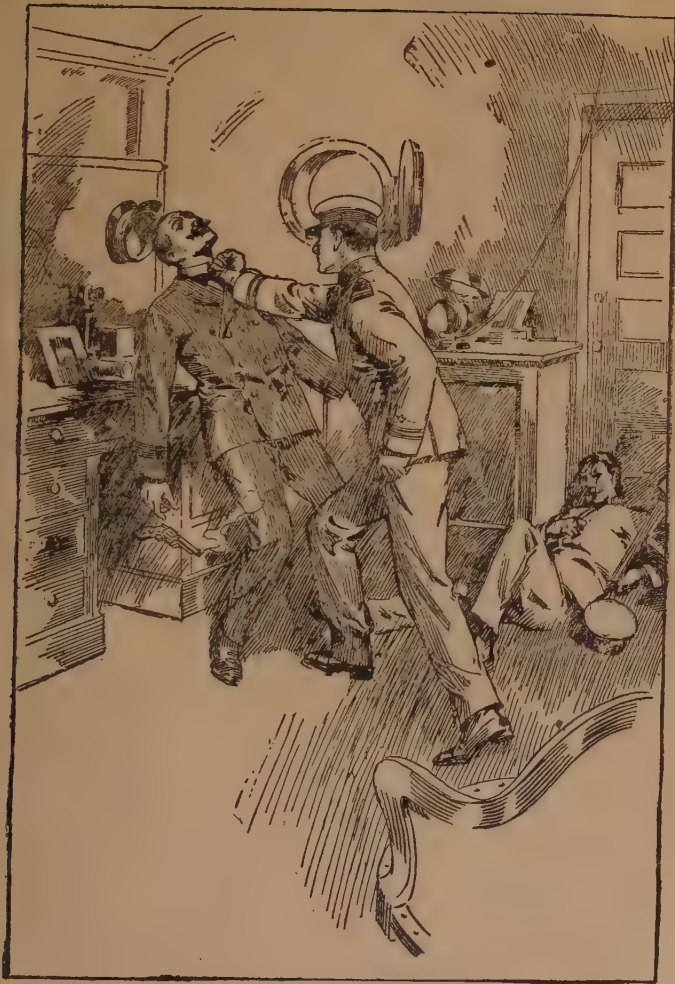
“For that you die!” hissed the German commander.

“Oh, that’s nothing. Lieutenant Davis has already been ‘killed’ a good many times,” jeered Hickey. “Being killed is a sort of habit with Lieutenant Davis.” Sam’s countenance was twisted into an unpleasant looking grin.

“Here!” snapped the commander, snatching a gold watch from his own pocket and thrusting it into Hickey’s hand. “You shall hold the watch.”

At that moment the commander of the sea raider was in greater peril than he knew. Hickey was on the point of springing upon him, but a warning look from Dan restrained the red-headed boy.

“In one minute, unless Lieutenant Davis consents to answer my questions, I fire. Mr. Hickey, you will call out each fifteen seconds



The Shot Was Fired Point Blank.

and at the end of the minute announce, 'one minute.' "

"What! An American watch? You aren't fit to carry an American watch," declared Sam. With that he hurled the watch through an open port out into the sea.

Captain Erich's face crimsoned with rage.

Once more he raised his revolver, aimed it at Dan Davis's head, and pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER IV

HARD HIT

THE shot was fired point blank at less than five paces.

Dan Davis crumpled up on the floor of the cabin.

Sam Hickey never could wholly efface the recollection of the expression on the face of the "Fox's" commander as he stood there holding the revolver, a thin wisp of blue smoke curling upward from the muzzle. It was the most cruel look he had ever seen on a human face, revealing the soul of the man behind it.

Sam Hickey did not hesitate. With a bellow of rage he made one leap for Captain Erich. The momentum of his leap and the steam be-

hind Sam's punch was more than any man could stand up against. The German commander went down under the blow that the red-headed boy planted on his neck.

Sam snatched up the automatic revolver that had fallen from the commander's hand and after a quick look at the prostrate officer he sprang to the side of his companion.

"Dan! Dan! Did the brute kill you? Speak to me! Dan! Speak! If you're done for that hound never will leave this cabin alive. Dan!"

Lieutenant Davis groaned, his fingers working convulsively. By this sign Sam knew that his companion was making an effort to bring himself back to consciousness. Sam now bethought himself to examine Dan's wound. The bullet had plowed a furrow along the scalp, leaving a channel from which the hair was entirely gone. Blood was flowing freely from the wound, which Sam wiped away with his handkerchief that he might the better examine the path of the bullet.

"The hound!" he breathed casting a swift glance at the prostrate form of Captain Erich, who was beginning to come to himself. He rolled over on his back just as Dan Davis opened his eyes.

"Lie back for a few minutes, Dan. Thank Heaven you are alive. You——"

“Orderly!” called the commander in a weak voice.

“You keep quiet,” commanded Sam savagely, snatching up the revolver and pointing it at the ship’s master. “I am in command here for the moment. I shall need the surgeon, and perhaps you will too. I haven’t made up my mind just what I shall do to you. I shall wait until Lieutenant Davis wakes up sufficiently to advise me. I know what I should do to a pirate like you!”

Sam was working himself into a feverish heat despite his efforts to control himself.

“Sam! Sam!” called Dan weakly.

“Yes, old boy?”

“Wha—at have you done? Did he shoot me? Yes, I remember. He winged me, didn’t he? Where is he?”

“He has been taking a siesta, Dan. I landed a good stiff punch on his neck. I have his automatic. See!” added Hickey triumphantly.

“You shouldn’t have done that, Sam. Now we surely shall suffer,” rebuked Lieutenant Davis.

“Do you think I could stand idly by while that fiend shot you down? What shall I do with him, Dan?”

Dan, with his chum’s assistance, sat up. There he sat blinking at the other man on the cabin floor. For the first time Hickey found

himself wondering why the shot had not called any one to the captain's quarters. It came to him swiftly that the shooting was part of a pre-arranged plan, and that the captain had not intended to kill Lieutenant Davis, but to frighten him into answering certain questions which Captain Erich was most anxious to have answered, especially those with reference to the American warships then on the Atlantic Ocean.

"What shall I do with him?" repeated Hickey.

"It isn't so much a question of what you should do to him, as it is what he will do to us. We cannot fight the whole ship's crew. My head isn't very clear. It seems to me, though, that our only course is to submit and trust to luck to get out of it."

"You aren't going to fight for it?" questioned Sam in a tone of disappointment.

"No, not this time. Our turn will come later. I believe it is good judgment for us to submit to whatever form of punishment that ruffian sees fit to impose upon us. Hold him a few minutes until I get myself collected."

"Go over to the basin there and wash your head. Can you stand up?"

"I can try." Dan staggered when he got up and would have fallen had not Hickey supported him, Sam keeping a wary eye on Erich,

for he did not trust that officer. After washing the blood from his head and neck Lieutenant Davis felt much refreshed, though still weak. Dan stepped over to the commander.

"Get up, sir," he commanded.

Captain Erich lost no time in doing so. He too was a little unsteady on his feet.

"You shall be shot for this, both of you," fumed the captain.

"It strikes me that I have already been shot. You did not get all that you deserved, but I am willing to call it a draw for the time being."

The captain sank down in his chair, resting his chin in one hand. He was dizzy from the terrific blow that Sam Hickey had planted on his neck, for the red-headed boy's punch was no trivial affair. In the present instance he had added several pounds of steam to it, with the result already related.

Dan, his head still dizzy, and with a gone feeling in his stomach, sat down on the edge of the captain's desk, and a moment later asked Sam for the captain's revolver, which Hickey handed over with reluctance.

"I return your weapon to you, sir," announced Davis simply, laying the weapon on the desk.

Captain Erich snatched it up and, springing from his chair, jabbed it against Lieutenant

Davis's stomach. The commander's face was distorted with rage.

"Well, why don't you pull the trigger?" demanded Dan.

"Because he is too big a coward," interjected Sam Hickey.

Davis signalled his companion to be silent.

"You know very well, captain, that if you were to do that, and that if, perchance you were captured, which is more than a possibility, you would be executed for murder. That is why you dare not pull the trigger," went on the lieutenant calmly.

"Bah!" exclaimed Captain Erich. "I shall leave that for others to do. You have struck an officer of His Majesty's service——"

"You're wrong. I did the smiting," interjected Hickey.

"It is the same. Striking an officer is punishable with death. That is understood in all branches of the military service in all countries."

"For striking a superior, yes," cut in Sam significantly.

"Orderly!"

An orderly reported with a suddenness that indicated that he had been close at hand.

"Put these men in irons. Solitary confinement. I shall dispose of their cases later on.

Send the lieutenant-commander to me immediately."

The Battleship Boys were hustled away, and the "Oceanica" passengers on deck cast sympathetic glances at the two young officers, whom they knew were in trouble. Dan smiled reassuringly.

For some, to them, unknown reason they were taken to another cabin further forward from the brig. It's arrangement was the same, with the added advantage that far up overhead in the corridor was a transom that let in a faint light, for which they were thankful. Reaching the new quarters, they were ironed together by the master-at-arms and the grated door closed on them with a bang.

They sat down on the floor and looked at each other.

"How do you feel?" questioned Sam sympathetically.

"As if I had been hit with a ton of coal."

"Never having been in the coal business, I can't feel with you. You had a close call, but I have wondered if he really intended to kill you or if he is a crack shot," said Sam.

"This skipper belongs to the Imperial German Navy. He is not a merchant captain. All the men in the German Navy are trained to shoot as well as to use the sword. In the last

second before he pulled the trigger I knew he was going to shoot. I could see it in his eyes."

"And you never moved a muscle," said Hickey admiringly. "That was good nerve."

"What good would it have done? I think I shall lie down, if you can accommodate yourself to my doing so."

"Sure. We are regular Siamese twins. What one does the other has to do."

Remarkable as it may seem, the Battleship Boys fell asleep almost the instant they stretched out on the deck. They slept for hours.

Boom!

They sat up with a start and looked into each other's eyes. The jar of the shot rattled the door of their cabin.

"The six-inch!" exclaimed Dan and Sam in chorus.

"Some other helpless fellow is in for trouble," added Davis.

"Hullo!" A crash told the experienced ears of the young naval officers that the other fellow had fired a shot that had landed on the "Fox."

"The helpless fellow has teeth. Good for him!" cried the red-headed boy. "That was a good shot. It must have struck aft."

The other six-inch began firing, then the four-inch guns got into action, and the "Fox" shook from the explosions.

"How I wish I could see that," cried Davis, his eyes lighting up. "The fellow opposed to us must be pretty well armed; that was a heavy projectile that landed on us."

"Sounded like a six-inch shell," agreed Sam. "And there goes another! Man, he will sink us if he keeps on."

"I hope he does. Those above decks probably will be rescued. It doesn't matter about us."

"It doesn't? You have another guess coming, Lieutenant Davis. It matters a whole lot to Sam Hickey whether or not he gets put out. Sam Hickey has a few things he wishes to do before this war ends. One of them is that of putting a certain Captain Erich where he belongs. Ouch!"

Crash!

A shell had struck the "Fox," forward this time, and a heavy explosion followed. Then came another and heavier one. This last the boys only faintly realized, for it had entered the ship through the transom and come crashing down into the corridor where their cabin was located.

It was as if the world were coming to an end. Such a crashing and rending neither Battleship Boy had ever heard. Then utter darkness overwhelmed them.

CHAPTER V

A HUN'S REVENGE

“WE are done for,” cried Sam.

“If it would blow these shackles off I shouldn’t mind. You nearly pulled my arm off,” answered Dan in a choking voice, for he was lying flat on the floor on his face with a heavy weight on his back. There was wreckage all about them, and they were completely enshrouded in darkness.

The first thing to be done was to try to extricate themselves from the wreckage that had fallen on them. This was not so easy, but by concerted effort they managed to wriggle their way into the corridor, for the door to their prison had been blown in. Both boys were considerably shaken, and their escape was a miraculous one.

Hickey began blowing and coughing.

“Water!” he exclaimed. “I got a mouthful of it. The old tub is leaking.”

“Most any tub would leak after such a jolt as this ship has just had. I hear voices. They are trying to find out how badly they are hit.

And there go the six-inchers again. They certainly are not out of action."

After a while the shooting ceased altogether, and the "Fox" lay to for a long time. Some few moments before that the other vessel had stopped firing. From this the boys reasoned that the stranger had got the worst of it and probably was sinking, even if she had not already gone down. Then, too, repairs were going on on board the "Fox," she having been pretty roughly used.

The master-at-arms finally entered their cabin and informed the boys that they were to be released from their irons and that they were to be free to go on deck. He then relieved them of the irons and left them.

"I wonder what new deviltry that fellow is planning for us?" questioned Dan frowning. His head was hurting again, for the crash from the shell and the falling wreckage had set his wound to bleeding again.

"Perhaps he is going to make us walk the plank at sundown. I am not sure but that I should prefer that to what we have had since coming aboard this pirate craft," answered Sam. "Nothing but trouble all the time."

"There always will be trouble where we are, Sam," answered Dan smiling. "You know it follows us like a plague."

“Don’t I? Let’s go up topside and see what is going on.”

They found the passengers in great excitement. Three had been killed in the battle with the stranger, which the boys learned was an American merchant ship that had proved to be heavily armed, almost as much so as was the “Fox.” A fog bank, which still blotted out everything, had saved the American vessel, which had been badly hit. The “Fox” had had a narrow escape and the passengers said Captain Erich was in a towering rage.

Several of the cabins had been badly wrecked, and Dan volunteered, through an orderly, to assist in the work of clearing away the debris. His offer was accepted. Hickey was inclined to be rebellious.

“Aiding our enemies, Dan?” he questioned disapprovingly.

“And ourselves at the same time. Listen, Sam. That fellow has designs on us. By doing this work we may mollify him and receive better treatment. In that way our plans will be furthered.”

“What plans?” demanded Hickey.

“I have not made any. If we can get out on deck for a few days we shall find some way out of this. I am determined to escape. It is first necessary to know where we are. Of course I

have a general idea of our present location, but I must manage somehow to get a peep at the chart."

"Easier said than done, Dan," observed Sam.

"Yes, it is going to be difficult, but it can be done. Now let us report to the lieutenant-commander for duty."

Dan grinned as he said it. It seemed strange, to say the least, that these bred-in-the-bone young American patriots should volunteer to assist an enemy pirate in his work.

Lieutenant Davis, being a construction officer, was able to be of great assistance to the lieutenant-commander, so much so that, as he had hoped, he and Hickey were given unlimited deck liberty, and the privilege of messing in the saloon with the passengers.

The young officers soon found that they were regarded by the passengers as heroes. In some mysterious way the news of what had occurred in the captain's quarters, when Dan was shot and the captain knocked down, had got out. Davis's bandaged head verified the stories that they had heard, but when questioned about the conflict, both boys refused absolutely to either affirm or deny the report. The passengers got no information from them.

It was not until after two bells (one o'clock)

on the following afternoon that Dan and Sam finally completed the tasks they had undertaken. The lieutenant-commander thanked and complimented them courteously, and informed them that they were to have continuous liberty on deck so long as they behaved themselves and remembered that they were prisoners of war. Any violation of the ship's rules, however, would be promptly and severely punished. They listened but made no promises.

From the passengers the Battleship Boys learned that at least seven ships had been sunk before the two young officers came aboard, and that a lot of prisoners had been transferred to another ship about a week before. It was believed that some prisoners had been shot, as squad volleys had been heard at night on various occasions on the deck of the "Fox." The Battleship Boys thought that fate was in store for them, for they did not believe Captain Erich would permit Hickey's blow to go unpunished.

For this and other reasons, which the reader will readily understand, Dan Davis determined to escape at the earliest possible moment.

At supper that night Dan got the seat at the table next to the chief officer of the late "Oceánica" and from him learned that they were in the vicinity of the Canary Islands at a point some two hundred miles to the southwest.

Nothing occurred during that night to disturb the quiet of the ship. The captain had not been on their deck since the day of his trouble with Dan and Sam. He kept well to himself, for which the passengers were thankful. On the following morning before breakfast, one of the heavy guns was fired and awakened everybody. About this time the Battleship Boys received a summons from the captain to report on the bridge-deck.

"This is where we get ours," said Hickey. "Must be the sunrise gun. And maybe a firing squad for us."

They hurried up to the topside.

"Look there," exclaimed Dan.

An American unarmed tankship lay off about a quarter of a mile to the eastward. She had stopped at the signal shot across her bow. From her signal halyard flew international code flags reading, "We are carrying benzine." The master of the tanker had swung his life boats outboard and evidently was awaiting orders from the German commander to abandon ship.

Sam Hickey shook his head solemnly. He knew that Yankee skipper was facing great trouble. As the boys reached the bridge-deck they met the commanding officer of the "Fox," whose face wore a crafty smile.

"I have sent for you to give you some enter-

tainment, gentlemen," he said. "I know you will be greatly pleased. Wait." By flag signal he ordered the crew of the tank steamer to go below decks and await orders. The captain of the oil boat was a true Yankee skipper and, refusing to obey, informed the master of the "Fox" that he was not afraid of any Hun that sailed the sea.

Captain Erich shrugged his shoulders, and, at a signal from him, the raider got under slow headway. Dan Davis observed that both six-inch guns were manned and cleared for action, probably to prevent a surprise in case the American captain were intending to play a trick on the enemy. Such was not the case, however.

Suddenly both six-inch guns let go, and so unexpectedly that nearly every person on the deck of the "Fox" was thrown flat. Dan and Sam, being used to the discharge of big guns, quickly caught their balance and remained on their feet.

Two explosive shells, one forward and one just aft of the bridge of the tanker, entered the ship, leaving great gaping holes in her side.

A few seconds of terrible suspense, and then the explosion, that the Battleship Boys knew would follow, occurred. The benzine in the tanks went up in a mighty burst of flame. A human form was seen spinning high in the air,

and a huge cloud of black smoke burst forth and spread out like an umbrella. It was a wonderful sight, but a terrible one to those on board the raider, who knew that the crew of the tanker were being hurled to their deaths.

"The fiend!" gasped Dan Davis.

Women passengers on the raider screamed, and several fainted and were carried below decks.

There were two distinct explosions on the American tanker and then she went down, the sea being covered with a litter of wreckage and oil. Not a man on board the tanker survived that dastardly deed, nor was it the expectation of the commander of the raider that any man should.

Captain Erich turned a distorted, malignant face toward the Battleship Boys.

"That is the way that Imperial Germany revenges itself upon a nation that dares to oppose the Fatherland," sneered the captain.

"Imperial pirates, you should have said, Captain," replied Lieutenant Davis. "We thank you for this diversion, sir. We shall not forget the treat you have given us. Our one hope is that we may some day be able to retaliate in kind, and with you aboard the ship that we blow up."

"You will never have the opportunity," an-

swered Captain Erich, laughing harshly. "I have already made other plans for you."

"Thank you. You are very kind," murmured Dan with a bow and an ironical smile.

The faces of both Battleship Boys were burning with indignation. It was only by exercising the utmost control that they were able to restrain themselves from attacking that wolf of the sea then and there, and putting him forever beyond the possibility of repeating such a dastardly deed. They restrained themselves only because their duty lay in making their escape that they might fight these savages in a bigger way and help to rid the world of a great menace.

"Be ready, Sam," whispered Dan Davis after they had left the captain and once more reached the berth-deck. "We must get away while there is still time. That ruffian is planning something fierce for us. I don't think he has fully decided what he is going to do, but it will be something new and novel when he does make up his mind."

"When, Dan?"

"To-day, Sam. We dare not delay longer."

"How?"

"A way will present itself ere the day is done. In the meantime I shall make some preparations. Keep your eyes peeled, especially for ships. Watch your opportunity to pick up a

pocket flash light. Ask Mr. Burns if he has one. There is a possibility that they may not have taken his away from him, though I presume they have done so."

"I'll get one if I have to take it from the Old Man's cabin," answered Sam Hickey.

That day, begun so excitingly, was destined to be a thrilling one for the Battleship Boys, and they prepared for it with the care and caution of the trained men that they were.

CHAPTER VI

TAKING A DESPERATE CHANCE

"SOMETHING is going on," muttered Hickey as he observed traces of excitement in the faces of the raider's officers a little later in the day.

"We have changed our course," answered Dan. "It was done so suddenly that the ship heeled. There is something that they are running away from."

"I know what it is," interjected Mr. Burns. "They have just picked up a wireless that there is a British destroyer somewhere near. I heard two wireless men talking about it just now."

Dan and Sam exchanged significant glances.

After mess Dan casually gave their steward an extra large tip.

"Sneak some sea biscuit to me. I get hungry between meals. If you have anything like a canteen leave it in my cabin. Understand?"

The steward did. He could not very well misunderstand after receiving a ten dollar gold-piece. The steward, however, probably did not understand why the prisoner wished the biscuit, but the money looked too good to warrant his making inquiries.

"If you do it right, I will double the amount I have given you," added Lieutenant Davis. Dan found the biscuit and canteen in his cabin an hour later when he went there to make certain preparations. Later in the afternoon he strolled aft to the steam steering gear house and there hid his food.

So far he had been successful. Sam in the meantime was roaming about aimlessly, but with a definite purpose in view, as his companion well knew.

"What luck?" questioned Dan in a low voice as he passed Hickey just underneath the bridge.

"The best of luck," answered Sam in the same tone.

"Good. Keep within touch of me after supper."

Dan had a desperate plan in mind. He believed that he and Sam might be able to cut a lifeboat away and escape in it. Several of these boats were swung outboard from their davits, ready for immediate use. If they succeeded in cutting one away Dan believed escape would be fairly easy. He knew, of course, that if they were caught in the act they would be shot, but it would not be the first time they had been caught in a desperate situation.

Four bells, six o'clock clanged out. It was supper time, and the Battleship Boys responded with their usual promptness.

"I reckon you gentlemen will not have much of a part in this war," said an American pausing at Dan's table, for a word of greeting.

"It looks that way, sir."

"You will probably be taken to Germany as prisoners of war."

"Yes, sir."

"And you won't like that?"

"Naturally not, sir."

"Wish I might be able to do something for you, but I am not yet quite certain about what is going to happen to me. I am in business in New York——"

"Was," corrected Hickey.

"You're right, Lieutenant. We are well treated here, however." This was said with a

sly wink and a backward glance to indicate that there were enemy ears within hearing. "It could not be better on a liner."

"The passengers are well treated, so far as I have been able to observe," added Dan Davis. "They have good food and plenty of it, together with delightful entertainment such as blowing up ships with all on board, and so forth."

Dusk was upon them as the passengers came out on deck after supper. The instant the Battleship Boys set foot on deck, Hickey uttered a well-guarded groan.

"I see it," muttered Dan.

The life boats had been swung inboard and anchored to their chocks.

"Blocked!" announced Dan calmly. "No hope in that direction. We shall have to think of something else. Think hard, Sam, for——"

"There's a drifting life boat up ahead," said a passenger who stood with shaded eyes gazing over the rail. "The officers on the bridge are looking at it through their glasses."

One look and Dan Davis had formed his plans. He shot a swift glance at Hickey, who nodded understandingly.

"Where?" questioned Sam.

"Aft."

"Now?"

"Yes; meet me at the taffrail. Take it easy,

and don't show haste or excitement. Everybody is looking at the drifting lifeboat now. See, the 'Fox' is drawing in to have a closer look at it. Good! We are in great luck!"

"Humph!" muttered Sam, strolling away.

"It will be too dark for them to see us by the time the 'Fox' comes up with that drifting life boat," reflected Lieutenant Davis.

Cautiously entering the steam steering gear house, Dan took two life belts and stowed the provisions in a bag which he had found. It was a water-proof bag, and with reasonable care he knew that the contents would remain dry. The canteen that he had procured he had filled with water, and secreted under his blouse, and then slipped around aft of the steam steering gear house.

"Where is she, Sam?" questioned Dan eagerly.

"Close under the bows. Coming up fast."

"Get ready," ordered Davis.

Both strapped on their life belts and climbed over the after rail, Sam peering around the corner of the superstructure.

"When I give the word go over. Jump clear of the ship. Strike out for that life boat while we still are in full strength."

"If they discover us, what then?"

"Our troubles soon will be over. They will

either run us down or shoot us to pieces, that's all. It's a toss up in any event, but you and I will never say die until we are too far gone to say it at all. Ready?"

"Aye, aye."

"Jump!"

Two figures leaped far out from the stern of the steamer. Not more than ten feet of space separated them. Descending feet first, both struck the water at the same instant and disappeared in the turbulent wake.

As they left the rail there was a muffled scream from the deck and another form came hurtling down just as the heads of the two Battleship Boys emerged from the sea.

"Look out!" yelled Hickey in a choking voice.

Dan and Sam ducked under the sea, but none too soon, for the body hit the water almost on the spot where they had disappeared.

CHAPTER VII

TROUBLES COME FAST

THE Battleship Boys came up a second time prepared for a battle in the sea. They believed that some one from the "Fox," discovering their escape, had sprung after them and that the raider would swing and pick them up again. Each in his own heart determined that there would be one less German before they were picked up. Then they made a discovery.

"It's a woman!" cried Davis.

"Yes, it's the tub of lard!" shouted Sam.

"Mrs. Renwick?"

"Yes."

"Get her. I'll go for the boat. If you need assistance, sing out." Dan struck out for the life boat that was now in plain sight when he topped a swell. So well had he timed their leap that he had only a few yards to swim, but those few yards required all his strength. The sea was comparatively calm, but the swell was heavy indicating that there had been a storm somewhere near.

Dan reached the life boat and clambered

aboard after a desperate struggle, the little craft rising and falling on the swell, making his boarding difficult.

Once aboard the life boat he looked back. A faint shout told him that Hickey had seen him and was giving him his direction. There were oars in the boat—what else, Dan had no time to find out. He swung out the oars and began pulling with all his might for the place where he believed Sam and his burden to be.

“Here!” yelled Sam when he saw that Dan was heading wrong.

Thus corrected, Davis succeeded soon thereafter in pulling alongside and then began the work of rescuing Mrs. Renwick. It was not an easy task, for the woman was very heavy, and now a dead weight.

They got her aboard finally, and then Hickey clambered over the gunwale, well-nigh exhausted.

“Whew! That package of lard is heavy,” groaned Sam, sinking down in the boat. “I had to give her a tap on the head. She was trying to drown me. We both should have drowned if I hadn’t hit her.”

Dan was devoting his attention to bringing the woman back to consciousness. Hickey after a little stood up and gazed over the sea.

“Raider nowhere in sight,” he announced.

"Glad there is something in our favor. What do you suppose tempted that woman to jump over after us? Was she trying to rescue us?"

"I don't know. She is coming to now."

"There's no hurry. So long as she is unconscious she won't be getting into further trouble. I am glad to stay here until that wild Dutchman gets a few miles away. I hope they won't miss us until morning."

"Mrs. Renwick!" Dan was saying. "There, you are coming around all right now. It is Lieutenant Davis."

In a few minutes Mrs. Renwick was able to sit up and Dan gave her a drink of water.

"Why did you jump overboard?" questioned Davis.

"I—I don't know. I was excited."

"You saw us jump?"

"Ye-es."

"I reckon you were still hysterical. Well, it may prove to have been the best thing you could do, but instead of being aboard a ship you are adrift at sea in an open boat, and we may never see land again. We shall do our best, and that is all any one can do. I wish you to understand that you must be quiet and implicitly obey all orders given you. I am in command here. You will now lie down and get such rest as is possible under the circumstances."

"I don't want to lie down."

"You must lie down, madam. The skipper must be obeyed.

"Step the mast, Sam, and bend on the sail. I shall lay my course for the Canaries, so well as I can be guided by the stars. If we get thick weather we shall be lost."

The little sail began to pull the moment Dan drew in on the sheet and the boat made steerage way. Hickey uttered a cheer as the life boat heeled under the wind pressure.

"Know what boat this is?" demanded Sam.

"I do. It's one of the 'Oceanica's' life boats that went adrift when she was sunk."

"Huh!" grunted Hickey. "Can't tell you anything."

They had sailed on for a couple of hours when Sam, who was acting as lookout, uttered a shout.

"I see a steamer."

"Whereaway?" demanded Davis.

"Point and a half off the port bow."

"That's good. The 'Fox' was headed to starboard when we last saw her. She evidently was trying to get away from this fellow. What does it look like?"

"A ship."

"Watch her. Too bad we haven't a flash light so we can signal her."

"I helped myself to one belonging to the under-lieutenant. I thought we needed it more than he did."

"That's fine. Now we are all right."

Hickey soon attracted the attention of the stranger who demanded to know who was signalling and what was wanted.

"Castaways in a life boat," answered Sam.

"From what ship?"

"German raider 'Fox.' We are American naval officers until a few hours ago prisoners on board her."

A ribbon of light shot the night, swept over an arc of the sea, then picked up the life boat. The ship headed toward them, the search light following the little boat as it rose and fell on the swells.

Dan and Sam were eagerly watching the oncoming steamer. In the blinding light which was steadily held on them they were unable to make anything out of it. So strong was the glare of the searchlight that they finally were obliged to turn their backs to it.

"What!" cried Dan suddenly.

"Oh, help!" moaned Mrs. Renwick.

A flash had leaped from the deck of the oncoming ship, followed by a crash on the night air and a mighty splash in the water some hundred and fifty yards ahead of the life boat.

For a brief few seconds the ribbon of light from the ship swerved away from them. In those few seconds Dan Davis made a quick observation.

"It's the 'Fox!' " he shouted. "We are in for it now. Hard aport!"

Throwing the tiller hard over and hauling in the sheet, Dan swung his little craft around with its stern toward the raider. His boat made a smaller mark in that position and would be more difficult to hit.

Another shot was fired from the "Fox," the shell landing not more than fifty yards from the life boat. The spray from it as it struck the water, was blown over the occupants of the small boat.

"Keep down, Mrs. Renwick," commanded Dan as their passenger sat up and tried to get to her feet. Whether or not she was about to leap overboard in her fright he did not know, but he was obliged to use force to make her lie down in the bottom of the boat again.

"They are using their four-inch guns," announced Hickey.

"Yes, I see, but they have got to shoot better than they have been if they want to get us."

"You never can tell. It's the chance shots that are likely to blow us to kingdom come," answered Hickey.

Crash!

"Look out!" yelled Sam.

A well-placed shot had carried the mast of the life boat away, broken off well down toward the foot. The impact knocked Hickey into the sea. In going over he had grabbed the gunwale of the boat and thus saved himself from being carried away. He clambered back with the assistance of his companion. Mrs. Renwick was screaming.

"Will you stop that noise?" raged Sam. He was mad all through.

"The flash light pinioned them again. Then came another shot which went well over their heads as the life boat sank into the trough of the sea.

"He will get us on the second shot after the one that is coming now," said Dan. "Grab an oar, Sam. We must try to get out of range before they have time to fire the second. There comes the first of the two."

The explosion of the shell nearby flattened out both boys in the boat. Crawling back to their seats they began pulling with all their might, zigzagging as well as they could. The manoeuver saved them from the second shell. It passed well clear of them. But the Battleship Boys knew that their troubles were far from ended. They were wholly at the mercy of

the pirate raider that was certain to get them sooner or later.

"They have ceased firing," cried Hickey. "What do you suppose they are up to now?"

"From the actions of the craft I should say they were trying to get in closer. That means that they either expect to get a better shot at us, or else they want to save their ammunition by running us down. I am inclined to the latter theory. Still, while there is life there is a fighting chance," Dan made reply.

"But what can we do?" protested Hickey.

"Keep on paddling our canoe."

They did "paddle" with all their might, now and then pausing to push their fat passenger down to the bottom of the life boat. She was determined to get up. Hickey threatened all kinds of things, but even at that the lard packer's wife was not to be restrained, and they lost much valuable time in trying to keep her under control.

A shell now screamed over them so close that Sam declared he felt its hot breath on his head.

"Getting closer," observed Dan calmly. "We are likely to be put out at any minute. Do you wish to go overboard and take your chance?"

"If you do."

"One of us must stay aboard on account of the woman," answered Davis.

"Then we both stay," announced Sam with a note of finality in his tone.

The searchlight was shut off with startling suddenness and did not reappear. They wondered at this. They could see the "Fox" quite plainly now. She was swinging. From her manoeuver one would be led to infer that the raider was about to give up the chase.

"What does it mean?" wondered Sam. Both boys were resting on their oars breathing hard from their exertions.

"Look abeam to port and you will understand," answered Davis.

Hickey uttered a yell. Looming up on the dark waters was a large ship heading toward the scene of the firing. The Battleship Boys were straining their eyes trying to make her out.

"Samuel, unless I am very much mistaken that vessel is a warship."

"If she is I'll bet she is a German cruiser," returned Hickey in a tone of disgust. "This is our unlucky voyage. It has been from the time we sighted New York harbor from the deck of the 'Long Island.'"

"She is a cruiser all right. Signal her, Sam."

Hickey did so. "Yonder ship is the German Raider 'Fox.' Go after her, then come back and get us," he signalled.

"Who are you?"

"American naval officers who escaped from the 'Fox.' "

"Tell him there are many women aboard the raider," ordered Dan. Sam did so.

"Can't fire on them, then," twinkled the signal lights on the warship.

"Who are you?" was Hickey's next question.

"Can't tell you. Enemy can read too."

"I never thought of that," muttered Hickey satirically.

The warship started in pursuit of the fleeing "Fox," and was soon out of sight. Sam kissed a hand to her.

"Good-bye. It's the briny deep for us. I hope he gets her, even if we perish because of it," he said. "What now?"

"Supper and then I am going to sleep, unless you wish to pipe down."

"Eat? I haven't had a square meal since we left the battleship. What have you?"

"Hard-tack and——"

"Bah! Give me something human. I'm wet, and I am hungry, and I'm mad."

Dan did the honors and prepared a very good meal for Sam and Mrs. Renwick. Davis said

the best thing for them to do would be to lie to until daylight, then, getting their bearings from the sun, set their little boat on its course. He had another reason for deciding upon this plan of action, which Hickey understood, but their passenger did not.

Mrs. Renwick abused them because of their inaction and told them very frankly that they weren't fit to wear the uniform of the United States Navy.

"Madam," replied Hickey, "had it not been for the men in these uniforms you would by this time be emulating the feat performed by one Jonah a few centuries ago." Sam paid no further attention to her after this. Shortly afterward Dan lay down to sleep, while Sam kept watch over their passenger until she finally sank into slumber. Sam then piped down too.

Boom!

Two Battleship Boys sat up suddenly and rubbed their eyes and blinked. The morning sun was shining brilliantly.

"Was that the bugle blowing for breakfast that I heard?" muttered Sam.

"No. Look to starboard, Sam."

Sam uttered a yell of joy.

CHAPTER VIII

WHERE DUTY CALLS

OUT there, rolling in the morning light, lay a drab cruiser. From her staff fluttered the British ensign. Nothing, unless it were the Stars and Stripes, could possibly have given the Battleship Boys greater joy.

Sam felt like dancing a jig, but the gold stripes on his arm, tarnished as they were, reminded him that, as an officer of the United States Navy he was expected to be dignified. This, however, did not prevent him from wig-wagging to the British cruiser that the life boat would pull alongside. Some little time was consumed in doing this, during which the cruiser edged a little closer to them. Finally the boys got within hailing distance. Dan megaphoned through his hands that they had a woman on board who could not go up a sea ladder, whereupon the side gangway was lowered. Up this they pushed Mrs. Renwick, while British jackies pulled. At last they shoved her safely on the deck. Dan and Sam turned sternward and saluted the ensign.

"Glad to meet you, gentlemen," greeted the lieutenant-commander with great cordiality.

Dan introduced himself and Lieutenant Hickey.

"Did you get the 'Fox?'" was Hickey's first question.

"Sorry to say we did not, gentlemen. She had too much speed for us," said Lieutenant-Commander Partridge. "We did not keep up the chase, knowing that it would carry us so far away that we would not be able to pick you up."

"I am sorry," replied Dan.

"How are you, Davis?" greeted a familiar voice. "The last time I saw you, we had tea together at the Hotel Van Wyck in Singapore. I did not expect to meet you adrift on the Atlantic Ocean."

"Lieutenant Jamison!" exclaimed Dan and Sam in one voice.

"Welcome aboard the 'Avondale.'"

"Is the lady with you of your family?" questioned the lieutenant-commander.

"No, sir. She was one of those captured by the raider, and forced her company on us. I will tell you about that later. I shall wish to report to your captain, if I may."

"Certainly. Captain Williams will see you after you have made yourself comfortable. I

see you both are in need of clothing. You have your caps, and I think, with a little altering, that we can fit you out with American uniforms."

"Thank you. We are not quite presentable, but that is not wholly our fault, as you can readily understand."

Mrs. Renwick was made comfortable in a cabin given up to her by an officer. Dan and Sam were soon bathed and in their new uniforms.—Their first duty thereafter was to call on Captain Williams to whom they related the story of their capture by the raider and their escape. They were able to give the commanding officer some useful information regarding the raider, her armament and equipment. He was out looking for her specially.

"By the way, Mr. Davis, your admiral in Europe has been asking for you. I shall report your safe arrival on board this ship. He has been anxious about you. You see we have not had a word about the 'Oceanica' since she sailed from New York. She has been given up for lost with all on board."

On the following morning a messenger handed Dan a radio message ordering him to proceed to the American naval base in Europe, at the convenience of Captain Williams, and to report to Admiral Bridges in command of the

American naval forces abroad. "Glad you are safe. We need you," were the concluding words of the message, which brought pleased smiles to the faces of the Battleship Boys.

A pleasant week was spent aboard the "Avondale," though there was disappointment all around at the failure to again pick up the German raider. Then one day the British cruiser came to anchor in English waters and the boys, bidding good-bye to their rescuers, went ashore. Mrs. Renwick was put ashore at the same time, and Dan and Sam saw her safely on board a train for London.

"You are good boys," approved the packer's wife, leaning from the railway carriage and tapping Dan on the shoulder with her fan. "If you ever come to Chicago be sure to call on us. And if either of you are ever in need of lard, I'll send you a whole carload of it, and it won't cost you a cent but the freight charges. Good-bye."

Dan and Sam left the railway station laughing heartily. A few hours later they presented themselves at the admiral's quarters and were admitted at once, Admiral Bridges coming forward to meet them.

"Davis, I am delighted to see you, and Mr. Hickey also. You surely have had a difficult time in getting here."

"Thank you, sir," replied Dan.

"By the way, I had a radio from Captain Farnham. He told me not to worry about you gentlemen as you have a habit of getting into tight places—and of getting out of them. He said you two would turn up safe and sound sooner or later. I see Captain Farnham was right. I am glad to see that you both are looking well."

"Yes, sir, we are in excellent condition," interjected Hickey.

"Your records show that you are especially fitted for special duties where cool-headedness combined with good seamanship and good judgment are essential. These qualities are what we need for the work ahead of you. For a short time you will be associated with the British fleet in the North Sea, and then with our own fleet. You will now act as observers on a British destroyer. A number of the latest, up-to-date American destroyers soon will be on this side of the ocean, when you will join out. I think you two young officers may confidently look forward to an interesting as well as an exciting service, in the early days at least, of your work over here."

"Thank you, sir. We are ready for any duty to which we may be assigned," spoke up Lieutenant Davis.

"I am well aware of that. How soon can you be ready to start for your new post?"

"We are ready now, sir. However, we should like to stop off in London for a day to be measured for new uniforms. We lost everything, except what we had on our backs, when the 'Oceanica' went down," said Lieutenant Davis.

"Let me see. To-morrow in London, the following day report at Ganton. Yes, that will be satisfactory. You will report at the British naval base at Ganton, Scotland. You will there receive your orders from Admiral Brock, who expects you. That is all, gentlemen, for the present. You will of course receive orders from me from time to time, but while aboard a British ship, perhaps I have no need to tell you, that you will be subject to orders from British officers, just the same as you would take orders from your own superiors were you aboard one of your own country's vessels."

"Yes, sir," answered Lieutenant Davis. "I understand, sir."

~~✱~~"I believe that is all, gentlemen, for the present," reiterated the admiral. "Good-bye and good luck," he added, rising again to shake hands with his young lieutenants.

The Battleship Boys left him eager to be at their new work as observers on a British destroyer, an assignment that gave promise of

some real service, for in the North Sea there was something doing all the time.

It was on the second day after their interview with their admiral that Dan and Sam got off a train at Edinburgh, Scotland, and, without delay, proceeded to the naval base that was situated in a little bight of land on the turbulent North Sea.

Admiral Brock, of the British Navy, received the young American officers with great cordiality. He explained to them the present situation on the North Sea, giving them freely some of the most carefully guarded secrets of the British government as relating to the warfare in that part of the world. That they were American Naval officers was a sufficient guarantee that all secrets entrusted to them were in good hands.

The Battleship Boys were turned over to Lieutenant Gibbs, of the destroyer "Dart," and with their dunnage were shipped aboard in the basin of the port. There they met the officer in command, a smiling, good-natured Britisher, Lieutenant-Commander Copworth, whose gray eyes showed the steel of which those hardy British mariners are made.

Dan and Sam looked the ship over from bow to stern. They were of the opinion that they liked the American type of destroyer better, but

of course they were too diplomatic to say so.

"You are just in time, gentlemen," said the commanding officer. "We are going out for evolutions. It is a little heavy outside, but that will make it more interesting for you. We shall be in port in time for tea this evening, and you may sleep ashore or on board as you prefer. We all remain aboard, of course."

"With your permission, sir, we shall do the same," replied Lieutenant Davis.

Soon after the boys arrived on board, the destroyer got under way. Out past the swing-bridge she steamed, passing a procession of ships coming in. There were tough looking trawlers, mine sweepers, drifters, every conceivable type of craft, all playing at the game of war. Submarines coming in from a night search for Huns, were wallowing up the harbor, brown sunken-eyed pirates, with heads and shoulders of their officers showing above the conning towers. These apparently did not so much as look at the destroyer. Then, clearing the outer harbor, the "Dart" stood out to sea, breasting the heavy swells of the turbulent North Sea.

The usual fleet evolutions were engaged in. It was a beautiful sight to watch the stubborn destroyers shouldering their way through the

heavy seas, like terriers bent on reaching their prey at all hazards.

The "Dart" was far in the lead, some thirty knots out, when suddenly dead ahead of them a periscope rose above the waves. No British undersea boats were supposed to be in that location.

The bow gun of the "Dart" let go a few seconds after the periscope showed itself. It was a beautiful shot. It cut off the periscope half way down, the upper part falling over and sinking.

Instead of diving, the undersea boat continued to rise. A second shot from the destroyer glanced from the curved side of the submarine.

"That doesn't look to me like a Hun boat," observed Lieutenant Davis, who, with his companion Sam Hickey, was holding to the bridge rail eagerly watching the operations.

"Cease firing!" ordered Lieutenant-Commander Copworth.

The undersea boat rose until her decks were awash and headed straight for the destroyer. As she approached an irate figure rose from her main hatch.

"You bloomin' idiots!" bawled a heavy voice through a megaphone. "W'y don't you look where you're shooting? A crazy Swansea

tramp couldn't do worse. Ought to let go a torpedo at you. Would serve you right." The hatch closed with a bang and the British submarine dived.

"Tough lot of baggage, those under-water fellows," said the lieutenant-commander grinning. "We couldn't take a chance with him; had to take a shot at his pipe. Things like that will happen occasionally. Makes them mad as hatters. There's another one, but he's showing his number. That's the way to do it. Must have been a raid on. I hadn't heard about it. Had no notice to look out for them."

The undersea boat rose dripping from the sea, rolling sickeningly in the heavy swells. It almost made one dizzy to watch him. "Want to speak you," he signalled, as the skipper of the craft poked his head through the manhole. The two boats approached as closely as the rough sea would permit.

"W'at's the news?" called the captain of the submarine.

"Haven't heard any. Get any game?"

"Caught a mine-laying Hun trawler and put him to bed. Blimp nearly got us this morning. Laid an egg over us. She was fairly sitting on us when we came up for a sight. Went back and bumped at fifty-five feet and there we stayed until she got tired of roosting over us

and flew away. Bally nuisance, those blimps."

"What d'ye want?" demanded the commander of the destroyer. "You're interfering with the evolutions."

"Nothing, only to say that I don't approve of this blawsted weather. Am going to bye-bye now, where the weather is pleasanter."

With that the commander of the undersea boat withdrew his head, the manhole cover came down and the submarine sank out of sight.

"What mugs!" said the master of the "Dart" grinning broadly, as he rang for three-quarters ahead.

The Battleship Boys were getting first-hand impressions of these hardy British sea fighters. They were fearless and they were efficient, and most of them ready jokers even in the most desperate of situations.

"None of that bye-bye life for me," said Sam. "I prefer something like a solid deck under me and looking down on the water rather than up through it."

"I don't think I should mind a cruise in one," interjected Dan.

"Oh you will find the opportunity before you have done with your part in this war," spoke up Lieutenant - Commander Copworth. "They're a bally nuisance, to those who live in them as well as to the enemy."

"But not in the same degree," added Dan Davis smilingly.

"That is true."

"Why is it," questioned Dan at luncheon in the wardroom that day, "that the narrow necks of water in these harbors have not been blocked by the Allies?"

"It isn't really possible, you know," answered the lieutenant-commander.

"I do not see why not," interjected Lieutenant Hickey.

"Experience proves that blocking of harbors is not feasible. Hobson failed at Santiago; the Japanese attempts to block Port Arthur failed—no such attempts have been attended with any marked success, though all have been made notable through the valor of the men who participated in them."

Dan did not press the subject. The thought of the canal-like entrances to those two harbors, where German submarines passed to and from their bases, fired his imagination and made him wonder if the thing really were impossible. He did not believe so.

Late in the afternoon the fleet, having completed its practice evolutions, turned homeward, arriving before sundown. No sooner were they tied up, with the drawbridge closed behind them, than activity suddenly started up

on every craft in the harbor. Signal flags broke out from the flagship of the fleet reading, "Under way and await orders outside."

"What does this mean, Mr. Copworth, if I may properly ask?" questioned Lieutenant Davis.

"It looks like action, Lieutenant. Of course it may be a part of the practice work, but the indications are the other way. I think, from appearances, Mr. Davis, that we are in for a lively evening."

"Good!" exclaimed the Battleship Boys in the same breath. Just how lively that evening was destined to be, no man could forecast, but Lieutenants Davis and Hickey ardently hoped that they might see action.

Their wishes in this direction were to be gratified to a greater extent than their fondest dreams imagined possible.

CHAPTER IX

“IT’S FIGHT, NOT PLAY”

DESTROYERS were coming up from along the coast, throwing the water high from their bows; trawlers and sweepers already were heading out to sea, and submarines were rolling along on the surface with the seas breaking over their conning towers from time to time.

“No play about this. It means fight,” announced the lieutenant-commander, his eyes lighting up. “Clear for action! Every man at his post. Mr. Davis, where would you prefer to remain if we come to grips?”

“Speaking for myself and Mr. Hickey, if we may, we should prefer to remain here on the bridge, sir.”

Mr. Copworth nodded his approval.

“The bridge is likely to be a pretty hot place, gentlemen. However, from what the admiral has told me, I understand you gentlemen do not mind heat.”

“No, sir,” answered Lieutenant Davis simply.

"There goes another string of bunting," announced Hickey, as the flagship broke out several signal flags.

"Formation orders," said Lieutenant-Commander Copworth. "We are to act as convoy for the flagship. That means, in all probability that we shall be at hand when the music starts."

"And be jolly well strafed," added a lieutenant. "What?"

The "Dart" swung out from the line of ships that were carrying out the orders of the admiral and falling into the positions assigned to them, and tore through the seas to take up its place abeam of the flagship. The whole fleet seemed to be in confusion, but out of this confusion quickly came order, and when that was established, the fleet was traveling in the shape of a wedge, with the point toward the enemy waters.

Somewhere in the far distance were mine sweepers dragging for new mine fields that might be expected to have been laid in anticipation of the British fleet's approach. In fact floating mines might be encountered at any time in the North Sea.

From out of the murk, beyond the range of the most powerful night glasses, from the sturdy mine sweepers came the radio warning, "German fleet approaching in force."

"Retire with all speed, deploying to right

and left and fall in with fleet," answered the wireless from the flagship.

"No doubt about it now," said the lieutenant-commander. "They are coming."

"The spirit of the men is fine," Dan confided to Sam.

"Yes, considering that perhaps some of them will not come back."

"The same may apply to us, Sam."

The red-headed lieutenant nodded and grinned.

" 'Dart' will take up position well in advance and scout for the enemy, at the same time rendering such assistance to the sweeps as may be necessary," was the order received by the commanding officer of the destroyer.

"Full speed ahead," was rung in over the bridge telegraph and the "Dart" leaped like a hound when it first picks up the trail of its quarry. The leap was accompanied by a lurch that sent the Battleship Boys staggering against the rail.

"Good remedy for a torpid liver," declared Hickey when he had recovered his balance.

"At this rate we ought to make a landfall with a bump at most any minute now," Hickey shouted in the ear of his companion.

"We are more liable to bump into a mountain of steel."

"Signal lights one point to port," shouted an officer, barely making himself heard above the wind made by the swiftly moving destroyer.

"Enemy advance scouts," announced the commanding officer after a long scrutiny of the sea ahead. "Stand by, gunners. Torpedo crews alert!" he shouted through a megaphone.

"Mr. Davis, do you two gentlemen wish to take charge of a gun?" asked Mr. Copworth.

"We shall feel greatly honored if you will order us to do so," answered Dan.

"Thank you. I thought you would prefer to have a specific duty. Take the bow gun, if you will."

The Battleship Boys saluted and hurried forward to the bow gun where they relieved the lieutenant in charge, who reported to the commanding officer for other duty.

"Now we'll show them some Yankee marksmanship," cried Sam.

The gun crew saluted as the two American officers took charge.

Dan quickly acquainted himself with the location of the ammunition racks, peered into each man's face and smiled as he did so, and when he had finished his inspection every British jackie of the forward gun crew was with him. Each showed that he felt himself to be in

the hands of a man who knew how to do things and possessed the courage to do them.

An enemy ship changed her course and began bearing down directly on the "Dart."

"They have us spotted," said Sam.

Dan nodded.

"They ought to open fire pretty soon. I don't know the plans of our commanding officer, but if I were in command, I should give them a few shots to keep them busy. The enemy is having it altogether too much his own way in placing himself at his leisure. See anything of the rest of our ships?"

Sam did not. He was unable to discover a trace of the following fleet.

"There it comes," cried Dan, as a flash of reddish flame shot up from the sea far in advance of them.

They waited for the crash or the splash of the projectile. None came.

"That surely is some shooting," averred Sam Hickey. The jackies grinned. "Rookies could do as well."

Still no orders from the bridge. The men at the bow gun were getting restive. They were eager to show their new officers what they could do.

"When you get the word to fire, men, take pains. Do not get excited. We want to score

a hit and let that 'Dutchman' know that he has the best gunners in the British Navy opposed to him. What is the range, Sam?"

"Five thousand yards or so, I should say."

Another angry flash flared up ahead and died out almost instantly. The report of the explosion was louder than that of the previous shot.

"Shot fell a thousand yards astern," announced a voice from the bridge.

The men of the forward gun started a cheer. Dan uttered a sharp command for them to be silent.

"Wait till we have whipped them, men. Then you may cheer all you like. We have work ahead," he said.

"Bow gun there!" hailed the bridge.

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Lieutenant Davis.

"You may try a shot when ready. Range five thousand yards."

"Aye, aye, sir. I have it, sir. Attention, gun crew! Ready."

Dan sighted the piece, gave a quick glance at the gun crew and waited.

"The 'Dart' had poked her nose deep into a trough of the sea. She came up shaking herself like an angry terrier that had been the unwilling victim of a bath.

"Fire!"

The word had not died on his lips ere the flash and the report came.

"Over!" called the spotter. "Good shot."

Dan's lips tightened.

"We must make a direct hit this time, men," he warned.

"Ready, fire!"

"Hit!" shouted the spotter, after a few tense seconds of waiting.

"Good work, bow gun," bellowed the commanding officer. "Fine shot."

Dan nodded to his crew approvingly.

"Other ships performing an enfolding manoeuvre," Sam Hickey informed his companion.

"The skipper will take care of that. Our business is to shoot and shoot straight," replied Dan.

Now the starboard guns let go. Both missed. They missed again, but Dan was too busy to notice the shooting of the other crews. He was doing his work painstakingly and without excitement, just as a careful man in an office would go about a task set for him to do.

"That enveloping movement is progressing," Hickey informed him. "If the skipper doesn't watch out he is going to get caught, then we will all go up the bloomin' spout, as an Englishman would put it."

"That's the time we fixed her," chuckled

Lieutenant Davis, as flames burst out on the ship they were firing at. "We will give her the finishing stroke if we can, men."

With a mighty crash a shell landed on the deck of the British destroyer just aft of the bridge, spreading death and destruction all about. How many men were killed or wounded, neither lad knew. A lieutenant in charge of one of the starboard guns had been killed. Hickey saw the bay men carrying him off. Hastening to the bridge he saluted and offered to take command of the gun of which that officer had been in charge. His offer was accepted. A few minutes later the red-headed boy, his cap tossed to the deck, was in the fight, and to good advantage. He was trying to reach one of the ships occupied in the enveloping movement. So well did he place his shots, that the Hun destroyer, sheered off and took up a new position. Sam quickly found him and planted shell after shell on his decks. The shooting of the Battleship Boys attracted the attention of every man on board who was in a position to know about it.

Dan's victim all of a sudden went up with a terrific explosion.

"Caught her magazine that time," grinned Davis. "One in memory of the 'Lusitania.' Now for the next."

He swung his gun abeam and trained it on first one and then another of the enveloping squadron. The "Dart" was now the center of a rain of fire, as several ships were directing their fire at her. Far to the rear, twinkling signal lights ordering the "Dart" to manoeuvre to the rear were sending their messages without effect. The line of British destroyers was taking a wide sweep to envelop the Hun envelopers.

A well-placed Hun shot wrecked the bridge of the "Dart." The lieutenant-commander was killed and with him two officers of the bridge watch. The deck from stem to stern was a litter of wreckage. Lieutenant Gibbs was left in command. He was made of the same heroic stuff as his dead commander.

Two guns already were out of commission, but the others were still at it, so hot to the touch that one could barely rest a hand on them.

"Keep firing till the guns blow up," commanded Davis.

"Lieutenant Gibbs has been killed, sir," announced an orderly in Dan's ear. "Ensign Carver says will you take command?"

"If he wishes it. Why doesn't the ensign take command?"

"He prefers that you do so, sir."

"Very good. What is our condition?"

"Very bad, sir. Engineer force nearly all dead or wounded, and water almost up to the boilers in the fire room. We can't last much longer, sir."

"We can fight until we go down. Tell the men to be British. We're all fighting for the same cause. Take the gun," said Dan to the gunner's mate.

Mounting the wreckage of the bridge, so he could get a clearer sight of the sea, he saw that the whole British fleet was in the thick of it. Here and there he saw ships go down, but more of these were German than British. More than half his crew were dead, and the ship plainly was on its last sea legs. The "Dart" was doomed.

"Cease firing!" he commanded. They marveled at this, but Lieutenant Davis knew what he was about. He worked his ship slowly along, manoeuvring for position nearer to a cruiser of the enemy that was devoting its attention to a British cruiser. They were at it hammer and tongs.

"Any torpedo men left?" called Lieutenant Davis.

"Four men left, sir," answered his orderly.

"Tell them to stand by for action. Two men to both starboard and port. They can handle the tubes. I am going to try for a drive at

that cruiser. She is getting the best of the 'Alert.' "

Watching the enemy, regardless of the fact that shells were falling all about, Davis finally had manoeuvred his sinking ship into the position that he had selected.

"Starboard torpedo crew, attention. Fire!"

A terrific explosion occurred on the German cruiser. The Hun broke in two and went down.

"Port torpedo crew, stand by!"

A fleet of destroyers was hemming him in. He saw that the life of the "Dart" would be **only** a few minutes now. He noted that his gunners were sticking to their posts, Lieutenant Hickey encouraging, driving, directing shots, for, after having torpedoed the German cruiser, Davis had given the order to resume firing. The "Dart" was losing headway, but she was still making a strong resistance with her guns. The enemy ships were crowding her closely. One destroyer from the enemy fleet dashed in with the plain purpose of ramming the "Dart." Davis watched her narrowly.

"Port torpedo crew, attention!" he shouted.

At the moment when it seemed as if the German ship were going to cut them in two, Lieutenant Davis swung the "Dart" about. She responded sluggishly, but sufficiently to turn almost broadside to the Hun destroyer.

“Port torpedo crew, fire!”

The distance between the two destroyers was so short that the force of the explosion of the torpedo and the immediate blowing up of the magazines of the German nearly threw the “Dart” on its beam ends.

She righted slowly, her guns blazing away with the hottest fire she had yet delivered. Her gunners, what were left of them, were fighting desperately, inspired by the wonderful spirit of their Yankee commander and his second in command, Sam Hickey. Not a British officer was left to fight on that ship. Two ensigns lay dying; all the rest had been killed.

Two more torpedoes were fired from the “Dart.” One sunk an enemy destroyer, the second damaged seriously, in fact crippled a Hun ship, but failed to sink her.

By now the German commanders were getting wary of that sinking hulk that was once the pride of her officers because of her lines and her speed. She was a wreck, but she still possessed a sting, a vicious sting.

Dan let another torpedo go and caught the stern of another enemy destroyer. The victim lost headway and stopped.

“Give her the guns. Rake her!” commanded the Yankee fighter.

The German soon began to list and finally

turned turtle under the raking fire of the guns, directed at her water line.

The "Dart" was down with her decks almost awash.

"Keep it up, men," encouraged Hickey. "We are goners anyway we figure it."

Dan was springing from one group of gunners to another, encouraging, and filling them with the same wonderful spirit that had carried him through so many desperate situations. This one, however, was the most desperate of all. He had no idea that either he or Hickey would come out of it alive, but he was not concerned about that phase of their situation. His one great ambition was to sink as many Hun ships as possible. He already had a good score to his credit.

The water was nearly up to the knees of the crew below. At Dan's order the fires under the boilers had been turned off and the fuel oil let out of the remaining tanks to lighten the vessel, and to minimize the danger from fire. The "Dart" lost headway and finally stopped and lay rolling in the swell.

CHAPTER X

HEROES OF THE DEEP

“DON’T give up, men,” urged Dan Davis.

“Watch us, sir,” answered a jackie in a thrilling voice.

“I have been watching you. You are heroes, every one of you, and I know your government will tell you so.”

They cheered him and fell to at the guns with new spirit.

Working the guns was now a difficult task, for the ship had settled so low that the water was nearly knee-high at the scuppers. The forward gun, however, was high and dry, though surrounded by heaps of wreckage. Hickey was up there, having gone there at Lieutenant Davis’s orders to act as watch officer and to inform Dan of any changes in the situation that Dan might be unable to see.

The enemy destroyers, observing that the “Dart” was now helpless, were slowly closing in on her. Lieutenant Davis climbed over wreckage to the port and starboard torpedo

tubes. There remained one torpedo apiece. He assisted in placing them in their tubes.

The air pressure, he found, was sufficient to fire them. He told each torpedo man to wait until he was sure of his mark, then to let go, not waiting for orders to fire, and to be sure to fire before the "Dart" took its last plunge.

Blood was streaming down Lieutenant Davis's face; his clothing hung in shreds. Sam Hickey was in a similar predicament, and so were the men of that brave crew of British gunners fighting under a Yankee commander who did not know when it was time to stop.

A torpedo launched from an enemy ship, fired at short range, entered the after part of the British destroyer. The stern of the ship was blown off, and every man on board was knocked off his feet.

"Torpedoes, fire while you have the chance!" roared Dan.

Both starboard and port tubes let go at the same instant, and each reached a mark.

"Gunners, give them a good-bye kiss!"

The gunners did.

"Hickey! Here, quick!"

"Aye, aye," was wafted back on the wind, and a few seconds later Sam was beside his companion.

"We're going down now, old chap. We've

made a bully fight of it. I have lost the count of ships sunk, but we have wiped out quite a chunk of the 'Lusitania' debt. I want you with me when she goes down."

"Very good, sir."

"Men, amidships!"

The jackies struggled over the debris, slipping and falling into water, that was now up to their waists.

"Good work, men. God bless you all. I——"

His words were cut short by a tremendous explosion. The finishing touch had been put to the brave little ship. Men were hurled into the air, and when their bodies fell to the water there was nothing remaining of the "Dart" save the wreckage that littered the sea where but a few moments ago she had been fighting so valiantly.

When the explosion came, Dan and Sam gripped hands, and in that position were blown into the air with their fellows. Their fall nearly killed both, for they landed on the floating top of the deck house of a sunken trawler.

And over them raged the tide of battle. There were others of the "Dart's" crew about them, some struggling for life, others beyond help. Once a destroyer thrust its sharp prow against the floating deck house top and pushed it aside, nearly upsetting the slender support

and barely missing throwing the Battleship Boys into the sea.

A British seaman caught and raised himself to this refuge. He flattened himself so as to make as small a mark of himself as possible, then, as the great battle swerved away from him, he sat up and took note of the other occupants of the deck house top.

"Hit's the bloomin' gold stripes," he exclaimed. "Dead? Naw. Got more lives 'n a Whitechapel cat. Got a wallop that time that nearly sent them to the old man's locker. Hi wonder—what?"

He was one of the gunners from the "Dart," and he knew a fighting man when he saw one. He had seen many in his time since the war began, but never any that, in his estimation, measured up to Lieutenants Dan Davis and Sam Hickey.

Kelly was his name and he was a gunner's mate. Kelly set to work in his clumsy way to resuscitate the two lieutenants. He chafed their hands and with what was left of the sleeve of his shirt, wiped the blood from the faces of Dan and Sam, and he washed them with salt water. He then propped them up so that the wind might blow on their faces.

Kelly's efforts were finally rewarded. Davis regained consciousness first; then Hickey found

himself. The battle was still raging, but now far away.

"Thank you," murmured Dan. "Ho—ow is the battle?"

"The 'Uns is on the run," averred Kelly. "Tyke it from me there wouldn't be henney to run hif hall was like you. 'Ow do you feel?"

"Weak, shipmate," answered Dan sinking back.

"Are any of the men saved?" questioned Hickey.

"Hi don't know, sir. Hi 'aven't seen wan of 'em."

"Too bad," muttered Sam.

"W'y not pipe down and rest a bit, sir. It'll do both of ye good. Hi'll keep the watch. Mebby w'en the 'Uns get chased hoff the ships'll come back and pick us hup. Hi'll keep the watch."

Both lads were glad enough to settle back on the deck house top and close their eyes. Both were still bleeding, but not so freely as before. Now and again a projectile would splash in the water not far away, whereat Kelly would shake a fist and express highly colored opinions of the "bloomin' 'Uns."

It was well toward morning when trawlers that had been doing their work with the fleet, began to pass on their way homeward. Kelly

stood up on the rolling deck house roof and, with hands to mouth, yelled with all his might. He yelled until he was hoarse, then set to abusing the trawler captains and all their kind. He failed to attract the attention of any of them, but it was doubtful if his voice was even heard.

In the darkness of the early morning a destroyer, badly battered, hove in sight, sweeping the waters with her searchlight.

“ ‘Ere’s one of our kind,” cried Kelly, standing up and waving his arms.

The sweeping searchlight beam passed and then came back and was held on him. He stood out clearly in the glare of light, waving his arms and shouting. He was seen and the destroyer cautiously headed in.

“Two Hamerican officers badly wounded, sir,” bawled Kelly through his hands.

“Aye, aye. We will get you,” came back the answer through a megaphone.

“Wake up, sirs; ‘ere’s the makings of a rescue. You’ll be hall right in a minute.”

The Battleship Boys stirred feebly and sank back. A boat put off from the destroyer, into which the boys were lifted and soon were on board.

The work of rescue went on, and many another hero was picked up from the deep by ten-

der hands that morning and given care by the surgeons of the fleet.

None on the rescue ship knew Dan or Sam, never had heard of either, and did not know why they were there. That they were American naval officers, however, was sufficient for the Britishers. Nothing that they could do for these two wounded men was neglected.

In the morning Kelly related the story of the "Dart" and the heroism of Davis and Hickey. It got to the ears of the officers, and, sending for Kelly they drew all the facts from him. It was with shining eyes that the commander of the destroyer went to the ship's bay immediately afterward and grasped each Battleship Boy by the hand.

Early in the forenoon the destroyer swung up the harbor at a twenty-knot gait. Slower craft got out of her way well in advance, for it was plain that this battle-scarred destroyer was in a hurry, and reasonable to suppose that her skipper was not in a pleasant frame of mind after an all night battle with the Huns.

Dan and Sam, with others, were carried ashore on stretchers. Dan asked for the man who cared for them on the raft. He insisted on seeing him before they were taken away. Kelly was sent for. Dan took both of Kelly's hands in his.

“You are a noble fellow, Kelly. When we get fit to talk I shall bring your services to the attention of your government, if that already has not been done. Please keep in touch with us. I should like to have you serve with me, though I suppose that is not possible, as we are in the American navy and you will have to be with your own service. Thank you, shipmate.”

Kelly swallowed hard, tried to answer, but his voice had suddenly left him. Hickey waved a feeble hand to the weather-beaten jackie. They were then taken ashore to an emergency hospital, where they remained for a week. The two young lieutenants had been more seriously wounded than was at first thought, but having such wonderful vitality, and having lived correct lives they had something to build on and were soon able to sit up. While in this stage they were visited by many officers of the fleet, from hardy undersea pirates, to trim, dressy commanders of the aristocratic dreadnaughts and dashing destroyer officers. All paid homage to the bravery of the Yankee officers who had fought so valiantly and to such good purpose.

On the third day of their stay in the hospital there was a stir in the ward, and Admiral Brock with several members of his staff entered the ward where Dan and Sam lay, and

paused at their cots. The Battleship Boys half raised themselves and saluted. The salutes were answered punctiliously by the admiral and his staff members.

"Gentlemen, I am very glad to see that you are getting along," said Admiral Brock cordially. He shook hands with each lad and patted him on the shoulder.

"Thank you. I think we shall be ready for duty in a few days," replied Lieutenant Davis.

"Your American Admiral has given orders that you go back to billets when you are able to be moved. He does not care to take unnecessary chances of losing two such valuable officers. It is probable that neither of you is aware of the fact, but you gentlemen are very highly esteemed by your fleet commander and by your Navy Department as well. I wish to congratulate you on your wonderful spirit and your work in the battle the other night. It was splendid. There were made deeds of heroism that night, but none more brilliant than yours. After your ship was under water you sunk a German destroyer. I think that record will stand for some time," said the admiral turning to his staff.

Each then in turn shook hands with the boys. The faces of Dan and Sam were flushed. It embarrassed them very much to be compli-

mented and made heroes of. This was plain to the visiting British naval officers and amused them very much, besides. It is the way of all brave men to shrink from discussing their own heroic deeds or from hearing others do it.

"As I understand it, as soon as you are able to travel you are to go to London for as long a time as is necessary, and take a rest. I do not know what your service will be after that, but we all hope to have you with us again. I should like very much to honor you with decorations, but your government not looking with favor on such honors I shall have to defer that to such other time as they may think differently about it. Gentlemen, if there be anything that I can do for you, you have but to call on me."

"There is nothing, thank you," replied Dan. "You have done us a very great honor in thus visiting us here, an honor that we never shall forget."

With final hand shakes all around the British officers left the hospital, Dan first having said a good word for Gunner's Mate Kelly.

"A fine chap," observed Hickey. "Going to London, are we? I hope I shall be able to get some real honest-to-goodness American ice cream there. If ever I rise to the command of a ship I am going to have an ice cream plant installed on board."

"Fine food for a fighting man," answered Dan smilingly.

"Good for man and beast," added the red-headed lieutenant.

A few days later they were sent to London as convalescents, and there they rested and enjoyed themselves. When able to get about they replenished their wardrobes, for the Battleship Boys had had hard luck with their uniforms since starting out to war. They were the recipients of many invitations, for the London papers had given long accounts of their work in the North Sea battle, much to the annoyance of Dan and Sam. All invitations except those of a semi-official nature were politely declined by them, for they were conserving their strength against the day when they knew they would be called upon for further strenuous service.

Their leave had now expired and they were due to report to the admiral of the American forces, which they did one morning in early summer at a certain English seaport where their admiral made his headquarters. There they met with a happy surprise, and one that they considered payment enough for all that they had suffered.

CHAPTER XI

A NOVEL ASSIGNMENT

“**T**HE British government is most appreciative,” said Admiral Bridges, in command of the American Navy in European waters, after having greeted the young officers. “You have received honorable mention, so I am requested to inform you, and your own government has advanced you each ten numbers. Your promotion from now on should be rapid, provided you fulfill the promise your services thus far have given.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Lieutenant Davis gravely. “We shall always give all that we have to give.”

The admiral nodded.

“I had intended to place you on one of our own ships, but that can wait. In serving anywhere you are serving your own country. To come to the point, Admiral Brock has asked to have you for a special service that he has planned. I understand it is something novel, but full of danger. Of course that is a phase that we naval men do not consider.”

"No, sir," answered the boys in one voice.

"You will proceed at once to the naval base at Ganton where you will receive your orders from the British admiral himself. I am not expected to acquaint you with the full details. I might say that the service you are to perform is a secret one. You will have your own commands and will be free to act on your own initiative, at all times using your own judgment. Good luck to you. You will receive your designation to an American ship within a few weeks."

The admiral shook hands with the Battleship Boys who left him wondering what this secret mission might be. On the following morning they reported to the British admiral at Ganton. Their interview with him was of a very confidential nature. When they came out from that interview the faces of the boys wore broad grins, which each smoothed out with a hand before facing officers and men on the street.

Boarding a train they proceeded to a point some hundred miles from the naval base, whence they went by motor car to a small landlocked bay on the North Sea. There, floating motionless, rode five huge battleships.

"Aren't they beauties?" cried Sam Hickey enthusiastically.

"They are, indeed."

"And to think that that is a slacker fleet, Dan."

"It doesn't seem possible, does it? The same remark, I hope will not apply to us and our crews. There seems to be quite a number of men aboard. I wonder where we shall find the lieutenant-commander. Ah, there comes a motor launch ashore."

A few minutes later the young American officers were greeted by Lieutenant-Commander Enright of the British Navy. The gangway of the nearest battleship was manned by a captain's guard of four jackies as the three naval officers went aboard from the launch that had come for Dan and Sam.

"You never would imagine that these were reconstructed cargo boats, would you?" questioned the lieutenant-commander proudly.

"It is difficult to comprehend," answered Hickey.

"And those twelve-inch guns forward and aft?" questioned Davis.

"Wood. They haven't even got holes in them. There is not a gun in this entire fleet, except a few Lee-Enfield rifles in case of need, and they will be of little use to you."

"So the admiral told us. The purpose of these ships is to deceive the Germans?"

"Exactly, Lieutenant. Our battleships are

needed elsewhere at the moment—that is, we are sending some away to-day. This is purely a dummy fleet. One shot from a gun of small caliber in a vital spot would sink any one of them. We expect that sooner or later some of them will be sunk. If you can, in the meantime, scare the Huns you will have done your part well. This will be your flagship. You can look it over at your leisure. We will now go aboard the other four ships. They are in command of ensigns of the British Navy. Daredevil boys they are, and you will find them full of steam.”

One by one the four remaining battleships—all dummy ships—were visited, and the young ensigns presented to Dan and Sam. Each ship was a perfect copy of a battleship, down to the smallest detail, but instead of steel, everything above decks was wood. The hulls, of course, were steel. New engines had been installed and the ships were rated as ten-knot boats, though able to do more under forced draught.

“Here is your fleet, gentlemen. You have your general orders from the admiral; the rest, as I understand it, is to be left wholly to your judgment,” concluded Mr. Enright. “I suppose you will sail sometime to-morrow.”

Dan nodded his understanding.

“If you need assistance you have your wireless.”

"We shall try to stick it out on our own resources," answered Lieutenant Davis. "If we cannot do that we are ready to go to the other extreme."

Mr. Enright soon thereafter left them, after having officially turned over the fleet to its new commanders.

After his departure Dan and Sam made a critical survey of their flagship.

The four ensigns were then called aboard and, in the cabin of the "Burke," the six officers discussed their coming duty. The ensigns had been on the North Sea for some months, and knew it well.

Finally all details were arranged, when Dan addressed the officers, saying:

"Gentlemen, you will be prepared to sail at midnight and in the formation as decided upon. Keep a sharp lookout for submarines. We can't afford to be stung by one of those hornets. It would be a disgrace to every man in the fleet if we were caught and torpedoed—if the whole fleet were sunk without our even firing a shot."

The ensigns went back to their ships, and Dan and Sam sat down to their supper, for it was now late in the afternoon.

"This is what I call a real slacker fleet," declared Lieutenant Hickey. "If we get back with whole skins we shall be fortunate indeed."

"We will cross that bridge when we come to it," answered Dan laughingly. "We are now going out to hunt Germans and dodge them while we are hunting them. Funny situation, isn't it?"

"It's a scream."

There was much to be done. Out on deck they came face to face with Gunner's Mate Kelly. Both boys shook hands with him cordially.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Kelly," said Dan smilingly. "I am afraid, though, that we shan't be able to sink any ships on this voyage."

"Hit certainly does look that way, sir," answered the sailor solemnly.

"May I ask what particular duties you are supposed to perform?" asked Lieutenant Hickey.

"Hi serve the twelve-inch guns, sir." Kelly never changed countenance as he made the announcement.

Just after dark black smoke began rolling from the funnels of the dummy battleships. Each ship had four funnels, two being dummy funnels, but so arranged that each would show smoke. Commodious cabins were provided for the officers, and even the men had cabins, certified for two seamen each.

At exactly eight bells, midnight, a signal was set on the "Burke" reading, "get under way."

The "Burke" moved slowly ahead, the other ships of the dummy fleet falling into line in their assigned places. The line straightened out, with proper intervals between each ship and steamed out to sea with all the dignity and strength of appearance that marked the real dreadnaughts of the British Navy. Dan Davis and Sam Hickey on the bridge of the flagship were grinning broadly each to himself. Just the same, Lieutenant Davis was in command of a fleet, with Lieutenant Hickey second in command, with almost as much responsibility as falls to the lot of the commanders of Great Britain's latest battleships. In the present instance, officers and men were facing even greater perils because they had nothing with which to defend themselves.

The dummy fleet sailed on through the night headed for German waters. They sighted the lights of Ostend, then picked up Zeebrugge and wore on up the coast, standing well out to sea, and avoiding mine fields so far as these were shown by the latest Admiralty reports. Mine fields were constantly changing, so that one never knew when he was going to wade right into one. One mine would be amply sufficient

to utterly destroy any one of this make-believe fleet of battleships.

“There they are!”

It was just as the gray streaks of the coming dawn first showed in the east that Lieutenant Hickey made the announcement.

“I see them,” acknowledged Lieutenant Davis. “Protecting their mine layers. We have caught them red-handed.”

German destroyers had suddenly appeared in the haze not more than a mile away. Trawlers of the German fleet began hurriedly ploughing homeward, and the leading destroyer let go a shot that passed high over the “Burke” and hit the water very close to one of the following dummy battleships.

“Left into line!” was the signal broken out on the flagship, which then turned to port, running parallel with the coast. The other battleships fell in behind it so that all were soon sailing at right angles to their previous course. The enemy interpreted this as the first move toward a broadside, and putting on full speed dashed for home, leaving a foamy wake behind them.

“Good work,” signalled the flagship.

“’Fraid cats,” muttered Hickey grinning broadly. “Say, Dan, this game is working out much better than I had any idea it could.”

"Wait! We haven't begun yet. Signal man, there! Tell the fleet to follow the flagship.

The signal was set and the flagship stood out to sea further. Dan gave the order to the commanders of the other ships to keep a sharp lookout for submarines. "When they get over their fright they are likely to send some out after us," he added to his companion.

"Ship coming up on the starboard beam," hailed the lookout.

"Aye, aye," answered the bridge.

"What do you make of her, Sam?"

"Nothing but her sticks. She will come up in a few minutes. Probably one of our own boats."

"I think not. Those masts can belong to no other than a German destroyer."

"What are you going to do?"

"Keep our present course for the time being. I think she is making for the port for which the others steered. Did you observe the course they took getting in?"

"Yes."

"That evidently is the channel. Half speed!"

For a time they traveled at that rate, then as the strange boat came up more fully the battleship swung again and steamed slowly back over their course parallel with the coast. The Hun destroyer, for such the stranger proved to be,

was tearing along at a tremendous speed, plainly in an endeavor to avoid being cut off by the battleships. Dan's turn, apparently had fooled the enemy ship which swung out a little further. Davis gave the signal to increase distance between his own ships. He was up to something, but as yet Hickey was unable to make up his mind what it was, so he looked wise and said nothing. Dan was manoeuvring to reach the channel leading to the German base, just before the destroyer came abeam of it. Sam Hickey was keeping the watch ahead, while Dan with glasses steadily at his eyes was keenly observing that German hurrying home.

"Left of line swing in. Enveloping movement. Watch out for mines," was the order broken out from the signal halyard of the flagship.

The young commanders of the other battleships instantly saw the trick Lieutenant Davis had played on the German destroyer. The German saw it at the same time, but he saw it too late. There were battleships between him at the channel that led to his base, and there were battleships between him and the free waters he had just left.

"Sweep in!" signalled Lieutenant Davis.

Under full headway the fleet steamed in on the trapped destroyer. He began to let go with

all his guns. Shore batteries added their voices to the din, but the "deaf and dumb" battleships uttered never a sound.

It must have been an unhappy moment for that destroyer captain when he saw that he was trapped, with that powerful Armada sweeping down on him. He took a desperate chance and swung in a short cut for home, straight into the mine field laid by the Huns for British ships.

A crash and an explosion shook the battleship from keel to bridge.

"We're hit!" announced Sam Hickey.

"Sound the general alarm. There goes the 'Dutchman!' "

The "Dutchman" indeed had gone. The destroyer, by Lieutenant Davis's clever seamanship driven into the perilous mine field, had struck a mine. A great burst of smoke and flame shot into the air and the wreckage of the German destroyer fell in a shower over the waters of the North Sea.

"We're on fire, sir," announced an orderly calmly, saluting his commanding officer.

"Thank you, sir. Lieutenant Hickey, take command of the fire fighters."

"Very good, sir," answered the red-headed Battleship Boy.

If Dan Davis was concerned he did not show

it. Glancing back he saw a burst of smoke shoot up from the superstructure of his own vessel. The battleship was indeed on fire, fired by the German shell that had hit them.

"Follow flagship," he signalled to his fleet.

Dan turned out to sea and performed certain evolutions, each one of which carried them a little further from the shore. He wanted room.

The flames in the superstructure threatened the ship's destruction.

CHAPTER XII

TOYING WITH DEATH

"**D**O you need assistance?" signalled the nearest sister battleship.

"Thank you, no. No damage astern of us, is there?"

"None."

"That is good. Keep formation and avoid appearance of fear of enemy. Close watch for undersea boats."

Dan observed the German side narrowly, but he could see no indications of anything coming out. The Huns had no desire to face such a formidable fleet of dreadnaughts. Davis knew that the failure of the battleships to fire on them

would puzzle the Germans, but he had slight fear that the enemy would arrive at the correct conclusion. What he must use all his skill in doing, in addition to keeping his ship afloat, was not to place himself in position where the enemy might surmise that he was unable to fire on them.

"Well, what do they say back there?" demanded Lieutenant Davis of his orderly.

"Fire under control, sir."

"Did it do much damage?"

"To the superstructure, yes, sir. Not much below, sir."

"As soon as the fire is out I wish to see Mr. Hickey here. In the meantime have the boatswain's mate see to it that canvas is prepared and painted the same color as the ship. Have it stretched over the burned part to hide the damage. I wish this attended to at once and the canvas put in place the moment it is safe to do so."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Half an hour later Lieutenant Hickey reported to the bridge.

"Close call that, Dan. That camouflage idea of yours is a good one. I was wondering what we should do so we might not expose our sham. Anything doing over there?" with a gesture toward the enemy shores.

"No. Either we have them frightened or else they are planning some trick."

"That was the cleverest trick of yours that I ever heard of. And the Hun walked right into it with his eyes open. My, but he had a fright when he saw we had him crowded into a corner."

"He would have been all right had he not lost his head, Sam. I think, had I been in his position, that I should have pulled the destroyer through and taken the regular channel. At least we know where the channel is now. Set the signal for change of course, north by northeast twenty-three."

The battleship fleet swung and proceeded up the coast. If Dan had any specific plan in view in taking this course, only he himself knew what that plan was. Steaming up and down along the coast was rather dull work, but he had varied the monotony considerably, thanks to the scared commander of the Hun destroyer. The way the other destroyers had fled was evidence enough that they feared these British battleships whose guns were heavy and whose shooting they had experienced only a few weeks since in the big battle participated in by the Battleship Boys.

"Watch closely for signals at all times. May sound foolish to you, but will have their bear-

ing," was the next signal sent to the sister ships.

"I don't wish them to think we are amateurs, because that might be the means of letting us down if we should be caught in a tight fix. It is necessary that every subordinate should have absolute confidence in his superior officers, and especially in his commander. What does the crew think about our work?"

"Nothing said in my hearing. They have been rather busy, you know, Dan."

It was about that time that Gunner's Mate Kelly was saying, "I told you so" to his mates.

"W'y, mytes, those gold stripes 'aven't henney equal afloat. They could strafe the 'Uns even if their 'ands was tied behind their backs. Did ye see? W'at? An' the old man is hup to more tricks right this minute. 'E's playing crazy. Look at the likes of them hevolutions. Not down in the books. 'E don't fight by the books, no, sir—'e fights with 'is 'ead. 'E'll get us blowed up before 'e quits, but there'll be more of the henemy blowed up w'en 'e's through with 'im. Give 'im time and 'e'll send the whole bloomin' bunch to blighty. Now w'at?"

The fleet had swung into line like a company of soldiers, and had laid their course for the

enemy's shores. They proceeded in this formation until they reached a point about five miles from land, after which they swung back and proceeded in a straight line, one ship behind the other.

"Teasing the henemy. W'at?" chuckled Kelly. "Watch 'im."

From the fighting tops of the ships of the fleet, keen-eyed observers scanned the waters and the harbors. The fighting tops on the dummy ships were not very safe structures. They were constructed entirely of wood. These fighting tops now used on the battleships of most nations, are also known as military masts, and are used for observation purposes and for mounting light guns. On the regular battleships they are made of a high grade brass, capable of standing a great strain. It is from these tops also that spotters spot the shots and record the hits in battle or at target practice. In Lieutenant Davis's fleet the spotters were watching for the enemy.

Before throwing over the "smoke boxes" Davis had ordered that more distance be observed between the ships after the smoke screen had been established. This would fool the enemy, and in case a torpedo were fired into the smoke pall, based on the distance between ships before they went into the cloud, the tor-

pedo would not be likely to hit a ship. Instead it might reasonably be expected to pass between them.

This was exactly what occurred. There was a hail from the fighting top of the flagship.

"Torpedo passing three cable lengths astern, sir."

Davis signalled this information to his fleet, explaining also that he was about to change his course and come about. The other ships were to continue on their course at slow speed. Kelly observed the manoeuver.

"Look hout for squalls," he said to his shipmates. "An' watch the old man."

Dan sent Lieutenant Hickey to the fighting top, to join the regular watch there, because the plan he had in mind required the closest calculation and execution.

"Keep clear and alert. I am going through the line soon," signalled Dan to his fleet." All now depended upon what the German submarine might do. Thus far it had not shown itself. At least the observers on the five ships had failed to see it, though their keen eyes had noted the path of the oncoming torpedo that had missed its mark. Dan reasoned that the submarine would remain where she was, hoping to get a better shot, and that to do so she would have to show her periscope.

With this in view he had dropped over a buoy at the instant the warning had been sounded from the military top. He was now feeling for this buoy.

The men down on the deck, so far as Dan knew, had not seen the torpedo, nor did they know that a submarine was lurking near at hand. It was not necessary that they should know.

"What do you see up there?" questioned Dan over the telephone that led to the fighting top.

"Nothing yet. Observers are watching us from the shore base and some craft in the harbor appear to be getting ready for a dash. I don't believe, however, that they will try to come out in the face of this fleet. We have them guessing."

"That is what I wish to keep them doing. Keep alert. Buoy in sight?" called Lieutenant Davis.

"Aye, aye," came the answer from the top.

Dan slowed down still more. His intuition told him that the eyes of the undersea boat must be upon them, even if only for a few seconds at a time. The smoke cloud shut off everything from those on the ships, and they could only guess what was on the other side of the cloud.

"Periscope rising," hailed Hickey from the fighting top.

"Where away?"

"Starboard, three cable lengths away. I'll give you the word when to go through. She's coming up higher, the fool!"

Whatever induced the undersea commander to take such a chance the watchers on the fighting top could not guess, nor imagine why he had waited so long unless it were to fall in astern of the rearmost ship and attack her. He still had an excellent chance of getting one of the ships.

"Go through!" yelled Hickey.

Dan swung the old freighter almost on a pivot and burst through his fleet, his siren uttering a deep, throaty whistle. He plunged through the smoke cloud, and there a short distance ahead of him stood the tell-tale periscope, swaying from side to side as the undersea boat rolled in the heavy surface swell, now and then barely showing the top of her conning tower.

CHAPTER XIII

UNDER THE OLD FLAG

THE undersea boat already had been discovered from the fighting tops of the other ships. They saw Lieutenant Davis's move and knew that he was after the Hun, though just what he proposed doing they did not know. Whatever his plan was it was bound to be a desperate one and with most of the chances against him.

"There goes the Yankee!" cried an ensign in the fighting top of the ship immediately behind the "Burke." The latter had narrowly missed being run down by him.

"He isn't so crazy as his actions would indicate," answered another Britisher. "That officer knows what he is doing every minute of the time. Never saw a man who could do such head work and do it so quickly."

"I believe he is going to try to ram the Hun!" cried the first speaker.

"It won't work. The sub will eat a hole in him big enough to drive a destroyer through."

While all this was going on Gunner's Mate Kelly had rushed forward, followed by half a

dozen of his shipmates, determined to see the fun, unmindful of the danger to themselves in being up there where the blow, if it came at all, would strike.

"Watch 'im!" yelled Kelly.

"Look at 'im!" cried another.

The battleship tore down on the U-boat at full speed, the water at her bows falling away beaten to a froth.

At that moment the periscope of the submarine was turned toward the rearmost ships of the line. It's commander had not yet discovered the onrushing battleship. When he turned his periscope back toward the "Burke" it was too late. Over him towered the huge hulk of the converted cargo boat. The battleship reached him just as the undersea boat sank into a trough of the sea, the "Burke" being on the crest of the swell.

As the submarine began to rise to the swell, the battleship descended. The keel of the big vessel and the turtle-back of the submarine met with tremendous force. The shock threw many sailors on the "Burke" from their feet. Lieutenant Davis in preparation for the crash was clinging to the rail, while up in the fighting top Sam Hickey was hanging on for dear life, fully expecting to be landed in the sea.

The cage mast buckled and, for a few sec-

onds, it seemed to the red-headed boy as if it were going to break off down near its foot. There was a snapping of braces and uprights, then the mast sprang back into place. It was a dizzy experience for the men up there.

The ship heeled to the accompaniment of a series of loud crashes. Kelly and his companions darted back, never stopping until they were far aft of the bridge. They thought the forefoot was going to pieces and the gunner looked for the whole works to come tumbling down about his ears.

"Blim'me!" gasped Kelly. It was the only word he could find that came anywhere near expressing his emotions.

"Close water-tight doors, number one!" bawled the young commanding officer. Dan did not know how badly off they were, but from the force of the collision he would not have been at all surprised had the entire bottom been torn out of the old freighter.

Ere the battleship had gone entirely over the undersea boat, Lieutenant Davis had spun the steering wheel about. The "Burke" made a sharp turn, so sharp that she heeled well over to port, finally righting herself slowly and laboriously. Dan knew that there was plenty of water in the hold from the slowness with which the ship came up to an even keel.

"Stand out to sea!" signalled Lieutenant Davis. The order was obeyed with promptness by his four ships.

Hickey came scrambling down from the fighting top, very red of face. He had lost his cap and his red hair was standing up where Sam had run his fingers through it.

"What are you trying to do?" he demanded. "Trying to shoot me over into the German lines, were you?"

"Look there!" answered Dan. "That was what I was trying to do."

A patch of oil appeared on the surface of the sea, where the U-boat had been but a few minutes before, and began to spread. A chair shot up from the deep and drifted aimlessly on the swells. The faces of the Battleship Boys drew down into stern lines.

"Tough, but it is war," murmured Lieutenant Davis.

"I can't find it in my heart to be sorry for those fellows," replied Sam. "The unspeakable crimes of the Hun have brought all this upon him. What now?"

"First find out how badly damaged we are. We shall in the meantime head for home. If we are fortunate enough to get there I shall consider that we are in luck. Here is the boat-swain. Well, how badly off are we, Jamieson?"

“We’re afloat, sir, and that’s about all. Forward compartment full of water and the bulk-head leaking. If we get heavy weather I don’t believe we can weather it, sir.”

“Have the pumps manned. I suppose repairs out here are not possible?”

“No, sir.”

“We will take it easy and log no more than a seven-knot clip unless the Germans send out a destroyer after us. In that event we shall be in a bad fix. I don’t think they will. They are afraid of this formidable fleet.” Dan’s face wrinkled into a smile. The boatswain saluted and withdrew to carry out the orders of his superior.

“Home,” signalled the young commanding officer. “Sam, there is nothing in the world like luck. In spite of all the trouble you and I have managed to get into, I think you will agree with me that we have rather more luck than we are rightly entitled to.”

“That’s all right, but you know luck has a habit of changing. The trouble with luck is that it changes at the wrong time. However, we don’t care.”

The bow of the “Burke” had settled so rapidly that Dan felt considerable concern over her. Leaving Sam in command of the bridge he made as thorough an examination of their in-

juries as was possible. He saw that nothing could be done except to proceed slowly and make as good weather of it as possible.

"She's getting lower by the head all the time, sir," said the boatswain.

"Yes. Her propellers are racing. That doesn't look good to me. I don't suppose the government gives a rap whether or not we lose the ship, but I don't like to begin my career as a commander by losing a ship even if she is a discarded hulk."

There was nothing to be done but make the best of a bad situation and to hope that no German destroyer might take advantage of their predicament. The Battleship Boys had done a good day's work—they had driven a destroyer to destruction; they had sunk a German submarine, and had thrown a scare into a German naval base without having fired a gun, not having one to fire in self-defense if they were attacked. Dan prudently covered his retreat with a smoke screen to hide his crippled condition, but from his fighting top a keen watch was kept.

Not a trace of the enemy was seen that night. By careful seamanship the Battleship Boys succeeded in getting their ship safely back to the port from which they had sailed. On the way in they passed some of their own destroy-

ers, and it was plain from the exchange of signals that the destroyers believed these wooden dummies were real battleships.

"The Germans are going to discover the trick one of these days, but we shall have some sport out of it in the meantime, and I hope we may be able to give them a few more scares," laughed Dan.

When the ship came to anchor that night, Dan sent a wireless to his admiral, in code, giving briefly the details of the cruise, and expressing regret that the ship had been damaged. He asked for instructions regarding repairs. Later in the night he received a radio from Admiral Brock reading:

"Make no repairs. Take out in deep water and sink 'Burke.' Congratulations on excellent work."

"Poor old flagship," murmured Dan handing the radio message to Sam without further comment.

"Our first command and perhaps our last," said Lieutenant Hickey. "When do we bury her?"

"After dark to-night. We must carefully destroy those dummy guns and remove everything that can possibly get away and float. One give-away and our secret will be in the hands of the enemy."

"I never thought of that," answered Hickey.

After dark the fleet steamed out, and while under way the guns were taken down, cut up and fed to the furnaces. All other movable material was disposed of in a similar manner. Davis then gave orders to draw the fires from under the boilers. An explosion would litter the sea with floating woodwork, which would arouse the suspicions of the keen-eyed enemy. A good part of the night was occupied with the work, and it was near dawn when Davis ordered his crew off. They took to the small boats and lay off waiting.

It was Dan Davis who went below to open the sea-cocks. The ship might sink before the man who did that could get away, so he preferred to take the risk himself rather than to order another to do so.

Sam Hickey remained on deck waiting for his companion. Dan was below so long that Sam grew worried. He knew the sea-cocks were open because the vessel was settling rapidly. She settled lower and lower until her decks were almost awash, and it was not until then that Dan came running to the deck.

"I wanted her to go down right. We must hurry now," called Dan.

"And we will go down right too—right now!"

There was no time for a life boat to draw up for them, so the Battleship Boys leaped into the sea and began swimming for it. Kelly, taking desperate chances drove his life boat forward to meet them.

"There she goes!" cried a voice from the small boat.

"And here we go with her," answered Lieutenant Hickey.

The life boat was caught in the suction and sunk, leaving the sailors and the two officers struggling in the water. Every one of them was drawn down with the suction, but being on the outer edge of the swirl the men went down only a short distance and came up to the surface quickly.

In the meantime boats had put off from the nearest ship of the fleet, but ere these reached the struggling men, one of Lieutenant Davis's own boats had reached them, and the crew were hauled aboard without the loss of a man.

Gunner Kelly, scratched his head and looked at his companions with an "I-told-you-so" expression in his eyes.

Dan made one of the other ships, the "Orient," his flagship, and put to sea at once. Instead of crossing to the enemy side, however, they cruised up and down thirty miles out, setting the regular watches, but giving the men

an opportunity to get a needed rest for what was before them on the coming day.

It was near morning when they surprised a German mine layer and its convoy. It was laughable to see the Huns hit up a pace for home with the fleet of battleships chasing them. Dan kept out of the course of his quarry, being reasonably certain that the German vessels would drop over mines as they fled. He gave up the chase at daylight, when in sight of the enemy coast. He now decided to try Ostend and see if it were possible to stir up trouble in that locality.

The weather thickened and drifting fog settled over the sea. Lieutenant Davis did not like this. Were he to come suddenly on an enemy warship in a fog, the probabilities were that the enemy would sink him. Having a dummy fleet was fine so long as everything went well, but there would come a day, he knew, when they would get into a bushel of trouble. Instead of drawing further out to sea, however, Davis, after consultation with Hickey, decided to set in further toward land in the hope of raising something.

They were getting close to the enemy mine field when suddenly the battleship squadron came out into clear water. The fog was behind them, but there was something ahead of them.

That something was a German U-boat wallowing in the swells, its decks awash, its officers in the open conning tower trying to pierce the fog with their glasses. Dan was satisfied that they were looking for his fleet.

“Run them down!” cried Sam.

“Afraid we cannot do that. What we can attempt is to drive them into the mine field just as we did the destroyer.” Dan broke out the signal for the enveloping manoeuvre.

The U-boat turned and made for home. Through his glasses the young American naval officer could see the officers on the undersea boat trying to get the main hatch cover down, so they might dive. Dan headed them off before they reached the channel that led into Ostend.

“Crowd on more steam,” signalled the flagship. “Go in as far as possible. “We’ve got him if we don’t slip.”

“There he goes under,” exclaimed Sam.

“Yes, but he is going to dive right into his own mine field. Oh, what a rattled Hun,” laughed Lieutenant Davis.

All hands expected to hear a terrific explosion and see pieces of the submarine shoot up into the air. Nothing of the sort occurred. What did occur was perhaps even more startling, because it was the unexpected.

Through their glasses they saw the tail of the U-boat slowly rise out of the sea until the "tin fish," as Hickey characterized all undersea boats, was standing on its nose. Its propellers were whirring in the air, driving the boat's nose further and further into the mud, for the water was not deep at that point.

The men on the battleships roared themselves hoarse. It was the most ludicrous spectacle they had ever seen on the North Sea.

"Oh for a gun," moaned Lieutenant Hickey.

"Wonderful shot," agreed Lieutenant Davis. "We could stop the propeller with a three-inch, eh, Sam?"

"We could," agreed the red-headed boy, regretfully. "They will get out of there if they wait for help. I think the men could get out of the main hatch if they could stop their engines. Too bad we are unable to finish the fish."

The battleships circled slowly around waiting for the next development in the situation.

"Why don't they come out and help her?" wondered Sam.

"Because they are afraid of these powerful battleships," answered Dan. "What do you suppose I am hanging around here for and taking a chance of losing my fleet if it isn't to see that U-boat done for?"

“Oh!” Sam had seen a light. “There she goes!”

The submarine seemed to have worked itself free, then, to the amazement of all the Britishers, rolled over on its back and sank.

“She has dug her own grave,” cried Sam.

“That is exactly what she has done,” agreed Dan. “Gentlemen, we will let that boat wallow for a little while, then we must be getting out of here. I don’t believe there are many alive on board her now, but we will make as sure of that as is possible.”

For a full hour the fleet manoeuvred about, then as the signal was set, the four ships turned homeward.

Four weeks and a day the dummy fleet steamed up and down the North Sea, keeping near the enemy coast most of the time, chasing mine layers and sweepers and destroyers from the open sea, but they sank no more ships. It was not prudent to continue the same tactics because the enemy might perhaps turn the trick on them. It was getting near time, as the Battleship Boys reasoned, for them to come to the end of their tether. It came, not through German guns, but through a storm, one of those sudden, violent gales that spring up on the North Sea almost without warning. The weather was very thick, and the commander or-

dered the fleet to spread out and lay their courses for home regardless of further orders.

It was a wild night—the worst Dan and Sam remembered having experienced at sea. Three dummy ships staggered into the home port next morning, but the fourth never came in. A destroyer was sent out to look for it, Dan accompanying the rescue ship. They found wreckage a-plenty, and what was more disconcerting they discovered a German destroyer examining some of the wreckage with interest. Dan wondered what the enemy thought when they discovered a twelve-inch cannon that had not been destroyed, supposed to weigh tons, floating on the surface of the sea. At any rate, the trick was exposed and the dummy' fleet's usefulness was at an end. The only regret of the Battleship Boys was that not one of the officers or crew of the lost dummy ship was saved. All had gone down with their ship or had been lost from the lifeboats in the terrible gale.

The young American officers again received honorable mention, and the story of their exploits in frightening the Hun, when finally it was given out to the public, made all England laugh.

After a few days' leave, Lieutenants Davis and Hickey were ordered to report at a certain port on the North Sea, there to join the Amer-

ican destroyer "Cromwell." The "Cromwell" was in command of a lieutenant-commander, and Dan was to be his next in command.

They stepped aboard the "Cromwell" late one afternoon in mid-summer, and saluted the flag. It held a new meaning for them after their long absence from it and, now that they were to carry it into action and fight under their own colors, they were happy. They were not yet at the end of their exciting experiences, however. Rather were the boys barely at the beginning of their experiences in the great war.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE U-BOATS' TRAIL

"THIS really is home, sir," said Dan in response to a hearty greeting from Lieutenant Commander Dill, in command of the "Cromwell."

"Yes, it seems good to have real guns," added Hickey. "We shan't have to run away now. I suppose you heard about our last exploit."

"I think every one who reads knows of that

exploit. Gentlemen, permit me to introduce Lieutenant Walker and Lieutenant Coville."

"We have met before, I believe. Was it in Yokohama that we first met, Mr. Coville?" questioned Dan.

"It was, but we were merely introduced and had no opportunity to get better acquainted. You will meet the other officers at mess this evening. They are either on duty now or sleeping. What do you think of our ship?"

"I like it. I shall like it better after I have gone over it more carefully. I should say the 'Cromwell' is the last word in destroyer construction," said Davis.

The "Cromwell" was indeed "the last word in destroyers." She was a fighter every inch of her, and very fast, as the commanding officer explained when the Battleship Boys had followed him, at his request, to his tiny cabin.

"The 'Cromwell' carries three and one-half inch guns, two on each side, with ammunition racks overhead, this arrangement permitting of more rapid firing," said Mr. Dill. "Our torpedoes are fired from the deck, from either side and the tubes can be deflected. It is a great improvement. Of course you are familiar with the bomb-dropping mechanism?"

Dan said they were.

"There is still another feature here that you

have not seen. This is a captive balloon for observation purposes."

The Battleship Boys' eyes sparkled. Here was an opportunity for some new thrills.

"When you go up in it you will discover some peculiarities about this new captive balloon that will excite your wonder as well as your enthusiasm," continued the commanding officer. "There is not a stick of wood in the ship. No splinters here, gentlemen. We are safe in that respect." Splinters of wood always have been a great menace aboard a ship in action. Many men have been killed by flying splinters.

The two young officers nodded their approval.

"I saw Captain Farnham before we left the Navy Yard in Brooklyn. He spoke of you and I told him that I understood you were to be assigned to the 'Cromwell.' What do you suppose he said?" The lieutenant-commander smiled quizzically.

Dan and Sam flushed a little under their tan.

"He said, 'Dill, you have my sympathy. Those young officers will lead you a terrible pace, and cause you more loss of sleep and anxiety than will the enemy. I shouldn't be at all surprised if they were to give you a few gray hairs. I am quite certain they did that to me.'"

"Oh, that is putting it rather strong, Mr. Dill," objected Dan, laughing to hide his embarrassment.

"Yes, and had I not known anything about you I might have had some doubts. Your record in the service is now too well known for any one to have doubts of you. Captain Farnham added that there were no braver or better officers in the service, and that you would distinguish yourselves over here just as you had done in your other assignments. I will add that I am much pleased to have you. We need men in this war who can do things. Any officers who can take out dummy ships, unarmed and sink heavily armed warships with them are good enough for me."

"Thank you. It was not difficult," Dan returned. "May I ask what is to be the special duty of this ship? Of course I understand we are to go after U-boats."

"Yes, of course. We shall do patrol duty. We shall have quite a fleet here, and it is the purpose to take the war over to the German side instead of waiting for them to come to us."

"They would not come out to give us a fight when we offered them the opportunity," complained Sam Hickey.

"Fortunately for you," said the lieutenant-commander smilingly. "We sail to-night and

rendezvous at a certain point to the north with others of our destroyers and cruisers."

"Do we work in fleet formation or patrol singly?" asked Lieutenant Davis.

"Both. By the way, you have not been to your quarters yet, and it is getting late. Perhaps you had better go now. We mess at four bells (six o'clock). The commanding officer messes with his officers. Room is too limited on a destroyer to permit of the luxury of a private mess room for the commanding officer. We sail at two bells (nine o'clock) this evening. You will both be on the second watch. For anything you wish to know come to me freely. We necessarily have to live in pretty close contact with each other, but you will find our young officers are a likeable lot of men and very capable."

"The uniform should be sufficient guarantee of that," replied Davis rather thoughtfully.

"Yes; and it ordinarily is," agreed the commanding officer.

The cabin assigned to the Battleship Boys was so small that Hickey declared he would be obliged to let his feet hang out of the port hole in order to find room for his head on the inside.

Soon after that they proceeded to the mess-room where they were introduced to those of their brother officers whom they had not met.

It was a jolly company and every man proved to be a most likeable fellow. The Battleship Boys came in for a good bit of chaffing over their exploits on the "deaf and dumb fleet," all of which they gave back in kind. When Sam Hickey told them the story of the U-boat that stood on its head and kicked its feet in the air the wardroom reverberated with the laughter of the officers.

"If they run from a destroyer the way they ran from us, we shan't have anything to fight," complained Lieutenant Davis.

"They won't," said Mr. Dill. "They know what a destroyer is and are willing to fight it—if the odds are on their side," he added. "A battleship is a little out of their class, you see."

"Our fleet surely was out of their class," interjected Dan, whereupon there was another shout of laughter. "By the way, sir, how do you get your gas with which to inflate the captive balloon?" he asked turning to Mr. Dill.

"We make it on board. That is a navy secret, of course, but every officer on board must familiarize himself with it."

"Must be pretty rough traveling up there," suggested Lieutenant Hickey.

"Not at all," Lieutenant Coville informed him. "That is another navy secret and——"

"Don't tell them," said the commanding of-

ficer. "Let it be a surprise to them when they take their trick as balloon observers."

Sharp on the stroke of two bells the anchor was shipped and "slow speed ahead" rung in over the bridge telegraph. The "Cromwell" moved and hit up a twenty-knot clip out of the harbor, everything under steam giving her a wide berth.

She was in skilled hands, and sensitive to her rudder. The Battleship Boys watched her actions with the keenest possible interest.

"One could play with her in action," averred Dan, "and dance around the old type of destroyer like a lightweight around a fat man."

"That hits off the difference perfectly," answered Lieutenant-Commander Dill who had overheard the remark. "Another excellent feature is that we can drop depth bombs astern and to port and starboard as well. It is a great advantage in dealing with U-boats."

"And increases the danger to the destroyer," observed Sam Hickey.

"Yes, that is true, but a boat as quick and fast as this one is can almost be out of the way before the bomb hits the water."

At midnight (eight bells) the two newcomers took their bridge watch. After the dummy fleet there was a sense of security and power in

this fighting machine that thrilled and stimulated them. They were eager to hear the sharp reports of the guns and to see the destroyer leap at the enemy like a terrier going into battle with one of his own kind.

It was not until their watch was nearly ended at four o'clock in the morning that the boys picked up the signals of the rest of their fleet. They then sent an orderly to awaken the commanding officer and surrendered the bridge to the new watch. There was too much of interest going on, however, to permit the Battleship Boys to pipe down. There would be plenty of time for sleep later on.

Signal lights twinkled as the ships of the fleet approached each other just before dawn, the dim shadowy outlines of the destroyers looming large in the uncertain light. They looked business-like, however, and Dan and Sam felt their hearts swell with pride. America at last was in the fight for liberty, and it had fallen to these two young American officers to strike one of the first blows, if not the first, for their country.

After a brief exchange of signals the destroyers began to steam away, singly and in pairs. By morning all but those traveling in pairs were out of sight of each other. It was to be a hunt for German U-boats in which each indi-

vidual ship was out on its own chase, each vessel, of course, having been assigned to a certain definite duty. The "Cromwell" was to set in close to the enemy coast.

When in sight of the enemy coast they came upon a Hun trawler at work laying mines. The destroyer promptly opened fire on her, and the third shot sunk the Hun boat. She went up in a terrific explosion. She must have had many mines aboard, the destroyer officers believed, to make such a tremendous upheaval.

"One nest of eggs destroyed before they were hatched," observed Davis to his companion.

The destroyer wore in a little closer, hoping to draw the fire of the land batteries, and it did, but the shots fell wide of the mark. The "Cromwell" was quick in getting out of the way. It darted and zigzagged, and performed the craziest of evolutions, Dan and Sam uttering repressed exclamations of delight as they observed her actions.

"There is a balloon rising over there," announced Dan pointing toward the coast.

"A Zeppelin," decided the commanding officer after observing her carefully. "Davis, kindly take command of the air-gun."

The anti-aircraft gun was mounted on the forward deck. Dan had already had training

in this work on the "Long Island," having practised on kites and small balloons sent up to be shot at.

The Zeppelin rose to a great height before sailing out over the sea to attack the destroyer. Dan saved his ammunition until the big bag was well within range. He opened fire slowly, noting the effect of each shot through his glasses, until he found the range.

About that time the dirigible let go a bomb. It hit the water not more than fifty yards off the bow of the "Cromwell." The commanding officer rang in full speed and the destroyer swung and darted in the opposite direction from the way the balloon was going. This would make it necessary for the dirigible to turn about and circle back in order to get over the warship once more.

Lieutenant Davis began firing in earnest, and shells were soon bursting all around the big bag of gas. Now and then the faint hum of her propeller could be heard. Bombs let go from the Zeppelin dropped frequently, but the skillful manoeuvring of the destroyer kept her well clear of them. Besides this, she was a small mark and a slippery one and difficult to hit at any time.

"Hit!" shouted Sam Hickey from the bridge. "Rudders torn away. She is helpless."

"But not yet done for," answered Lieutenant Davis.

The air-gun began kicking faster and faster as Davis pumped shells into the air. The destroyer by this time was pretty well in toward shore and others of the shore batteries opened up on her, but Lieutenant Davis did not even look shoreward. He was too busy. The port and starboard guns of the "Cromwell" began to fire in reply to the land batteries. One of the earliest shots reached a mark, for smoke rose from a point back of the breakwater and flames were distinctly seen. A loud explosion soon followed.

"I think we got into some ammunition," observed Hickey.

The commanding officer nodded.

"Hit!" announced Lieutenant Davis calmly. "I reckon that about closes this incident with the 'blimp.'"

The crew uttered a cheer. They saw a burst of flame high in the skies. A flaming mass began dropping toward the sea, tumbling over and over, leaving a broad ribbon of black smoke behind it. It was a sight that sobered the Battleship Boys, for they knew that they were sending human beings to their death.

"Good work, Mr. Davis," called the lieutenant-commander. "Fine shooting."

Dan turned to answer the compliment with a salute when his quick eyes detected a tell-tale trail on the water off the starboard quarter.

"Torpedo!" he shouted. "Port, sir quick!"

The commanding officer did not lose a second. He had snatched the steering wheel from the quartermaster before the words were out of Davis's mouth. The "Cromwell" fairly leaped in response to the "speed" signal that had been sent in by Ensign Rogers at the same time.

The torpedo passed harmlessly to port of the destroyer, but with only a small margin of safety for the warship.

"Bomb crews stand by!" commanded Mr. Dill, as the destroyer swung again and dashed over the torpedo's trail. "Let go!"

Starboard and port bombers released their depth bombs at the same time, then the stern crew sent a bomb sliding down the ways. The destroyer wheeled like a flash of lightning and the performance was repeated. The "Cromwell" circled and darted, followed by detonations and spurts of water. A whale rolled up dead. At first the officers thought it was a U-boat, then when they discovered what it was they smiled grimly. Theirs was grim business.

"You have her!" suddenly shouted Lieutenant Davis. "No whale this time."

An oily patch on the water told the story.

This patch grew and grew until it had spread over quite an expanse of sea. To make certain that they had finished the Hun the destroyer rushed in and sent over two more bombs.

Wreckage floated to the surface. It was all over with the undersea boat, and the Zeppelin, what was left of it, was already sputtering in the waters of the North Sea.

"In the North Sea lived a whale," hummed Lieutenant Hickey.

"Davis, I thank you. Your alertness saved the ship," said the commanding officer after the excitement had died down.

"Did you observe, sir, that warships in their harbor on the enemy coast appeared to be steaming up when we pulled away?"

"I did not." Mr. Dill was interested at once. "In force?"

"It appeared that way to me, sir."

"I will so report it to the admiral. Thank you. Davis, you are very much alive."

The admiral received the news by radio soon after that. In return, Lieutenant-Commander Dill was informed by his superior officer that it was believed the enemy at a certain point was coming out in force for a raid on the English coast that night. It was possible that this might be a general movement. If so the enemy forces would join about three hundred miles further

north. American ships were ordered to rendezvous at a certain named point no later than six bells that night—eleven o'clock.

Under full steam, her turbine engines sending heavy tremors through the ship, the "Cromwell" headed northward, buried her nose deep into the gray waters and plunged ahead at a forty-knot clip. There were a wet few hours ahead for every man whose duty called him to the deck.

As darkness finally settled over the seas, the wind sprang up. Soon the white-caps were flaunting their white faces on all sides, spray was falling in a drenching shower on the decks of the destroyer, and occasionally a solid volume of water rolled over on the sturdy ship with a thunderous report.

"Lieutenants Davis and Hickey will man the captive balloon," announced Mr. Dill.

CHAPTER XV

BATTLESHIP BOYS RIDE THE WIND

“**T**HAT is good news, sir,” acknowledged Dan. He had been eager for this very thing. It would be a new and novel experience. Neither boy had ever been up in the air further than the fighting tops on a battleship, but that never had disturbed them. Being up in a swaying captive balloon, however, promised to be a different matter.

The huge bag was unshipped and the gas was let into it from tanks, while the shapeless thing floundered about the deck until it seemed as if between wind and motion of the ship, it must be torn to pieces.

“I sincerely hope the thing doesn’t act like that when we get up in the air,” objected Dan rather apprehensively.

“Why not? Are you afraid?” demanded Sam.

“Yes, for you. I am afraid you may be seasick, Sam.”

“Huh!” chuckled Lieutenant Hickey. “If nothing worse than that happens to me I shall

feel that I am a lucky young man. How high does the machine go up?"

"We can let it up a thousand feet," answered Ensign Kates who had charge of the balloon equipment. "Ordinarily we do not let it up that far. If you wish, though——"

"The limit or nothing," interjected Hickey. "We might as well see the whole show. If it were daylight we could see all the way to Germany, provided the visibility were good."

Some little time was required to inflate the bag, for the gas bag was enormous. To the Battleship Boys it seemed as big as a dirigible. The cable, a rather slender looking affair, was coiled on a drum on the winch that controlled the raising and lowering of the bag, which of course was done by power. Little by little as the bag filled out, it slowly lifted itself from the deck. There seemed to be more ropes on the balloon than were ordinarily found on the deck of a big schooner. Most of these, however, merged lower down and then spread out for attachment to the car or basket in which the Battleship Boys were to ride.

After the basket had been attached, Ensign Kates went over the fastenings several times, and Dan Davis did the same. Dan made it a rule to take nothing for granted, and this habit had saved his life on several occasions.

"Any orders, Mr. Kates?" asked Davis.

"Don't fall out, that's all. It's coming up pretty fresh, but she will weather it. You will be amazed at the way this arrangement of ours stands a gale. It is an on-shore breeze to-night. All ready, sir."

The basket was resting lightly on the deck, the big gas-filled bag tugging heavily at her cable, and the boys, after adjusting their helmets, climbed over into the basket.

"Pay out," ordered the ensign.

The winch rattled and clanged and the captive balloon shot up with such speed that the destroyer seemed to be sinking into a bottomless pit. The bag was released rapidly at the start to get it above the masts as quickly as possible so that it should not strike, and the boys were five hundred feet in the air before the brakes were applied to the drum and the balloon slowed down. From that on it rose easily and gradually.

The unsteadiness of the support under foot and the swaying of the bag, together with the creaking of cordage and the weird tunes that the wind hummed on the ropes, were exciting. Their situation far up there in the night over the sea thrilled the Battleship Boys.

"This is the life," shouted Sam in his chum's ear. "The care free life of a bird."

"With not a limb to perch on when one gets tired of flying," finished Dan.

"What was it the commander said would amaze us when we got up?"

"He did not say what, but I think I know. It is strange."

Sam craned his head over the side of the basket, which was not quite shoulder high, and with barely room for the two boys to stand side by side.

"See how straight we stand up!" exclaimed Hickey.

"That is it," answered Dan. "I don't understand how they do it. The 'Cromwell' must be doing better than forty knots. One would naturally think that at that speed the balloon would sway down until it almost, if not wholly touched stern."

"Instead she stands up like the proverbial snake on its tail. That is queer."

Their tour of duty in the balloon was to be four hours, the same as if they were taking a bridge watch, and in the narrow basket, buffeted about on the winds, this was a long duty tour. Gazing down they could barely make out the outlines of the destroyer, though the white seas that she piled up on either side of her as she tore through the water, told where the vessel was.

"Watch sharply for signal lights," came a warning by telephone from the bridge in the voice of the commanding officer.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"All right up there?"

"Yes, sir. It is fine. Plenty of fresh air, sir. Lights to starboard—shore lights, I think."

"Bright?"

"No, sir; subdued. About three points off the starboard bow."

"Ostend," replied the voice, that sounded far away and unreal.

"I think so, sir."

"Watch particularly for anything coming out of the harbor there. If anything of the sort is attempted I wish to inform the flagship and ask for orders."

"Very good, sir."

It was thirty minutes later when Lieutenant Davis hailed the bridge.

"I think something is coming out now, sir. There are no lights, but I can make out several indistinct shapes. I can't be certain, but I believe ships are leaving the harbor over there."

Shortly after that the "Cromwell" made a sharp change in her course and headed in toward the coast. The bridge hailed again.

"Admiral orders us to go in and engage them with the idea of drawing them well out into the

sea. If we get into anything you will have to continue at your post beyond your watch."

The destroyer leaped through the seas at a fast rate of speed. Suddenly from dead ahead there came a flash, followed a few seconds later by a sharp report and a series of heavy jolts to the balloon. It plunged and swayed and spun like a top; then the wind pressure was suddenly lifted and the boys sailed on in peace.

"What has happened?" exclaimed Sam.

"Nothing much. The main cable broke and we are adrift, heading for the German lines," answered Dan Davis calmly.

Hickey uttered a groan.

"Battleship Boys' luck," he exclaimed hopelessly.

CHAPTER XVI

A TARGET FOR ENEMY GUNS

LIEUTENANT DAVIS swung his telescope about and swept the seas astern, as nearly as he could tell which direction was astern. But the once captive balloon was spinning so in the wind that he was unable to fix the position of the destroyer. Far in the distance up the coast he saw signal lights blink-



Gambling With Death.

ing. The signalling was brief; the lights died out.

“Do you know,” said Dan, “I believe this thing knows that it is free from the way it gambols along?”

“Unless I am greatly mistaken we are taking something of a gamble ourselves—gambling with death.”

“It isn’t the first time, Sam. I don’t mind that, but we are headed for the German lines. If this wind holds, which it shows every promise of doing, we are going to land somewhere far over yonder where nothing but German is spoken. Get me?”

“I get you.”

“That means prison—a Hun prison-camp.”

“Can’t we let out some of the gas and come down?” asked Hickey.

“Surely we can, and drown in the North Sea. You will have to think of something more practicable, Sam. I can’t imagine what happened to send us adrift. Perhaps that Hun’s shot cut our main cable. Come to think of it there were several severe jolts following the flash from his gun. Remember?”

“Yes. I thought the bottom was being jerked out of our basket. I believe you are right Dan. That fellow shot off our cables. I hope he didn’t hit the ‘Cromwell.’ ”

"Yes, that is what I think. However, it doesn't matter much how it happened. The fact is that we are adrift and in a fix."

"There! They have opened fire!" cried Hickey. "I wonder what they are shooting at? I don't see any of our ships within range."

"Sam, don't you know? They are shooting at us. There comes another one! That one was close, too." A shell had burst altogether too close to them for their comfort. Fortunately the bag had not been hit. One splinter from a shell in its side and their careers would come to an end in the waters of the turbulent North Sea in a very few moments.

Bang, bang, bang!

"Ouch!" yelled Sam. "That one was a bull's eye."

"Quick! Into the rigging!" commanded Dan. "The bottom of the basket is giving way. They hit us."

Both boys at the same instant sprang up to grasp the brace-bar that separated the stay-ropes about two feet above their head.

The strain on the broken bottom of the basket proved too much for it. The bottom gave way, with the finger tips of the Battleship Boys just over the brace-bar, and the swaying balloon whipping them about, perilously. They worked coolly, but with all their faculties on the alert.

Try as they did, with all their strength, to get a firm grip on the bar, they felt their fingers slipping little by little. They were breathing hard. Neither dared make a violent move, fearing to shake his companion loose.

"I am going to count three," gasped Dan. "When I say 'three!' spring upward and get your grip."

"Ho—how am I going to jump with nothing to jump from?" stammered Hickey.

"It is our only chance. Now. One—two—three!"

Hickey's fingers caught over the bar. Dan Davis's fingers slipped. He was falling.

"I'm going, Sam!" he gasped.

"No, you're not!" Sam's left arm was around his companion's waist like a flash, while he clung to the bar with one hand, supporting the weight of both with the other hand. It was a moment when the Battleship Boys had need of all their coolness, all their nerve.

"Let me get my arms about your waist, Sam, one at a time, then you get the other hand over the bar."

"Yes. Go to it."

"Now!"

Dan grasped Sam about the waist and Sam's left hand shot up and gripped the brace-bar. They rested for a few seconds.

"Can you hold me if I climb up?" asked Davis.

"Of course I can, if you aren't too long about it."

Dan Davis soon had his hands on the bar. There he hung, swaying from side to side, like an old-time performer at a country fair, his companion doing the same. They were resting after the strenuous efforts they had put forth.

"As soon as you feel strong enough, you get up first, Sam."

A shell whistled through the rigging within a foot of their heads. The Battleship Boys let go at the same instant and fell.

They brought up with a crash in the broken basket. Dan caught the top of the basket as he dropped in, feet first. One hand shot out and caught Hickey, not with a very firm grip, but just enough so to give the red-headed boy, one of whose legs was dangling through the bottom of the broken basket, a momentary check. Sam was quick to take advantage of the respite. He threw both arms about his companion.

There they rested for a brief moment.

"You must try to get up on the edge of the basket. Cling to the ropes there, then shin up to the bar. I think it can be done. After you have tried it and fallen in, I shall know whether it is safe or not."

Hickey grunted. Words failed him, but he made the effort and succeeded. In the meantime Lieutenant Davis had pulled himself up to the top of the basket. He motioned for Sam to creep to the far end of the bar to make room, which Hickey did with the utmost care and deliberateness of movement. Dan followed him up with equal caution and a few moments later both boys were sitting astride the brace-bar, clinging to the rigging.

Sam passed the back of his free hand, over his forehead.

"This being a bird isn't all that it is supposed to be," he complained. "The humble angleworm has it over us like a circus tent."

"We have a gas bag over us," Dan reminded him.

"That is not all we have over us, either. Hullo! There is Ostend. We are going right over the harbor."

"I see. Use your eyes now. See all you can. The information will be useful to our commander," advised Davis.

"Useful to our commander! He surely will have to have wings to get any information that we may have for him. Lieutenant Davis, it is my opinion that you and I never will deliver anything to him. We are going straight to bye-bye for the duration of the war."

The anti-aircraft guns of the land batteries now began shooting at them. The balloon had risen to quite a height, for after reaching their perch the boys had sawed away at the ropes until they succeeded in cutting the basket away. It had disappeared in the darkness below them. The basket and its equipment were quite heavy, and the lightening of the burden had caused the balloon to rise, as Davis knew that it would.

"What are we going to throw over next?" inquired Hickey.

"I think you would make pretty good ballast to discard," answered Dan. "See where those batteries are placed? That is good information. The works are all lighted up down there as if they were having a celebration."

"And wasting ammunition on us."

The boys were soon swept on beyond the naval base at Ostend and darkness once more screened all below them. All of a sudden the balloon began to spin again, and then——

"Hold tight! She's going over!" shouted Davis.

With amazing suddenness the great bag rolled completely over. The Battleship Boys, clinging to bar and ropes for their lives, were whipped this way and that, first slammed on the bag on their faces, then jerked out into the thin air, as the gas bag resumed its former po-

sition. For some time it continued to spin, and list, and acted as if it were possessed.

The young officers, dizzy, confused, out of breath and more or less dazed from their terrible experience, could do little more than hang on.

"Wha—at happened?" demanded Hickey between gasps.

"You may search me," answered Davis.

"That was just like the cracking-the-whip game that we used to play at school. I hope the confounded thing doesn't take it into its head to throw another fit. I know I shall let go if it does," declared Sam.

"You don't intend to do anything of the sort. You will hang on until either the bag collapses or we are shot down."

"Why don't we pull the string and let out the gas? It's safe now that we are over the land."

"I can't reach it, Sam. I had considered doing that. There is nothing left for us but to ride the wind until this runaway affair decides that it has had enough and settles down to the ground."

Sam Hickey began humming, "Where Do We Go From Here?" all the time keeping an apprehensive eye on the big gas bag overhead. They were fully ten feet below the bag itself, so the swing of their perch was a long one.

"Do you know, Dan, nature wasn't very wise when she arranged my anatomy?"

"I agree with you," returned Dan succinctly.

"Eh? Never mind your sarcasm now. I mean it."

"So do I."

"I was about to say, when you interjected a facetious remark, that had nature known what I was going to experience, she would have provided me with claws like a canary bird. Had she done so I could sit on this perch, blow cold, blow hot, and laugh at you between my warbles."

Lights suddenly appeared ahead of them, some distance ahead, perhaps several miles, and the Battleship Boys watched them with interest. Down there was life, activity, human beings. Up here was darkness and the great silence. They were two distinct worlds, though no more than a mile apart.

"Sam, I know where those lights are. That is Ostend again."

"That's the fact. Ostend must have moved."

"That is easily explained. That last jolt we got was a sudden change of wind which, on the North Sea coast, is as violent as are the currents in the sea in their quick changes. We shall sail directly over the harbor this time if the wind holds as it is."

"I hope they do not see us, Dan."

"Vain hope, Sam. See there go the star-shells. They are searching the skies for trouble."

"And we are the ones who are finding the trouble. Think they can reach us up here?"

"Surely they can." Dan, whose glasses were still suspended from his shoulder—they had lost the telescope—focused them on the harbor as his air ship neared it.

"They are using their searchlights sweeping the sea outside. The Huns must be expecting trouble from that direction. I wonder if our people are going to stir them up to-night? It doesn't look as if the enemy were going out in force this evening."

The entire harbor, between the searchlights and the star-shells that were being sent up, lay before the boys as plainly revealed as if the sun had been directly above them. The eastern pier showed white in the strong light, and out there on the sea, now and again as the light was flashed that way, the Battleship Boys could see the Stroom Bank buoy, that marked the entrance to the channel.

"You wouldn't think they would leave a thing like that out there, would you?" wondered Lieutenant Davis. "It is my opinion that this harbor might be taken rather easily."

"Suppose we try it?" suggested Hickey ironically.

"I am not joking, I mean it—— They see us! I thought so."

A blaze of star-shells lighted up the heavens, in which the black gas bag stood out clearly. Then the guns began to boom. Shells whopped up over an area of half a mile about the balloon. Star-shells spouted up and floated down, lighting everything with spreading green fires, while strings of luminous green balls, that the aviators call "flaming onions" bounced their way upward and were lost in the void high above the truant balloon.

"We appear to have stirred up the whole works," observed Sam Hickey dryly. "One would think from all this fuss, that we really amount to something."

"We certainly do compared with what we shall not amount to if they keep this up much longer."

A gun at the end of the western pier now opened up and fired rapidly at them, but like the others not a shot reached its mark. A great turmoil had enveloped the boys from the moment they got within range of the town and the harbor. Dan found himself wondering why the enemy did not send up air planes to down them. It would have been an easy thing to do, but per-

haps the Germans did not think it worth while to risk their air machines, on a night such as this, on a mere drifting balloon.

They were soon out over the North Sea again, and Dan had just remarked that he guessed they were about done with the Hun shelling, when, out of the darkness a shell came hurtling toward them. Of course they did not see it, but they heard it coming and with a feeling of intuition, gripped the ropes above them a little tighter.

The shell struck. The brace-bar on which they had been sitting snapped in the middle and all support was suddenly snatched from under them.

CHAPTER XVII

ALL HOPE SEEMS GONE

HAD it not been for their grip on the ropes, both boys would have fallen into the sea. As it was they had a narrow escape, and both were dazed from the jolt they had received. They were fortunate that it was a small shell that had been fired, but just now they had no time to think about the size

of the shell, nor of anything else than their present predicament.

"Get into the rigging. It is our only hope now," called Dan Davis. "Do you think you can make it?"

"If they don't hit us before I get up, yes."

The boys shinned the ropes and crawled laboriously up into the rigging, only a short distance from the big gas bag. It was pleasanter up there, and they twisted their legs and arms about the ropes which gave them better security than they had found on the brace-bar lower down.

They were now facing a new peril—the turbulent North Sea. It was possible that they might be blown clear across to England, but Dan did not consider it probable. Long before that the airship would be dragging in the sea. He made up his mind that when this moment came he would leap overboard. That lightening of the burden might carry Sam to safety. He knew better than to confide his intention to his companion, for Sam was likely to leap over first, and in fact he was even now considering doing so when the necessity arose.

The night seemed to be darker than ever, perhaps because of the blinding lights that had been in their eyes for so long while they were passing over Ostend.

The boys were now closer together than before and could converse without shouting.

"If we don't get out, good-bye, old chap," said Sam.

"And if we do it will be good morning, eh?" replied Lieutenant Davis whimsically.

"If you wish. Really, Dan, what hope is there?"

"The hope that every man of real courage has so long as there is still life in his body. I believe we are going to get out of this scrape without very much loss to ourselves, and with considerable valuable information, though just now I will admit that all hope seems lost. I am still thinking about that place back there. In trying to locate us they showed us the whole harbor. I do not consider that very good judgment, but I am glad they did it. I shall have to draw a map of the harbor for the commanding officer when we get back to the ship."

"When we do," scoffed Hickey.

"Yes, when we do," reiterated Dan with emphasis.

The air was bitter cold up where they were. The helmets and warm coats, however, reduced their suffering considerably, and then again the Battleship Boys were hardy and used to all sorts and conditions of exposure.

"Dan, I see a light far off to port. That is,

I did see it, but it was only a twinkle. It has disappeared."

"I doubt your vision, Sam," replied Lieutenant Davis, sweeping the darkened seas with his glasses. "Ships are not showing lights on these waters except as they have to do so in signalling."

"Hark!" Sam was listening intently. "I thought I heard the throbbing of propellers. Do you think it could be an airship?"

"No," replied Lieutenant Davis, after listening for a moment. "It is the roar of the sea that you hear. One can hear a long distance when in the air, you know.

"And one can fall a long distance, too," added Sam.

While they were keeping up their spirits by talking, Dan was continually listening to the sounds beneath them. He was of the opinion that the balloon was settling a little. He did not believe that this settling as yet was very marked, but that they were lower than they had been he was quite positive. It was only a question of time now when they would be floundering in the sea.

"Getting closer," announced Sam.

"Yes; have you just discovered that?"

"I have just declared myself to that effect."

"Keep up your grit, old man. We are still

alive, and I still have the feeling that we shall be for some years to come. Remember, it is not an easy thing to down a Battleship Boy."

"Just the same, Dan, we are being downed now—Look!"

"Where? Where?" demanded Dan sharply.

"There, dead ahead. Don't you see it? Here it comes. Look out!" yelled Sam Hickey. "Here we go for keeps!"

The crash came almost before the words had left Sam's lips. The impact was terrific. The boys felt their overhead supports giving way, and their grips on the ropes being loosened. In fact, the jolt had torn one of Sam's hands wholly free from its support.

The Battleship Boys found themselves going, being dragged. That was the last conscious moment for either of them for some time. Utter mental as well as physical darkness overwhelmed them as they felt themselves falling.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FORTUNES OF WAR

CONSCIOUSNESS returned quickly, but left them in a daze. Sam was the first to begin to take notice of their surroundings. Davis woke up almost immediately afterwards and groaned. He was bruised and stunned, and wounds on his body smarted and burned as if they were on fire.

For a few moments the boys lay still, trying to collect their wits, and to reason out what had happened. They had not the least idea where they were nor how they got there. It was certain that they were not in the water. The boys were swinging from side to side with a lurching movement that was wholly familiar to them and that soothed them so that they felt like going to sleep again.

"Sam," called Dan.

"Dan, are you there?"

"I think so. I am not quite certain."

"What happened?"

"I do not know. We are on a ship, Sam. That is all that I can tell you. Lie still. I am

going to feel around and see if I can discover anything."

Sam and Dan sat up at the same time. Dan crept cautiously forward on all fours, not wishing to take the risk of another fall. He suddenly came up against steel lattice work. Drawing himself up to a standing position, still cautiously groping and trying to think clearly, Lieutenant Davis uttered an exclamation.

"You may get up now, Sam, but hang on. You might be thrown overboard. I have made a discovery."

"What is it?"

"We are on a battleship. This is the fighting top. You understand what happened to us?"

"Then this is what I thought was a balloon. We must have collided with the fighting top."

"That evidently is what we did. There is a tangled mass of rope all over the top here. It is a wonder we weren't killed——"

"Or dropped into the sea," added Sam. "What a banging we did get."

"You see we struck against the rail here and were dragged over into the top. Otherwise we should be down there in the sea drowned at this minute. The next question is what are we on?"

"Perhaps on a German battleship."

"If that is so we might better have dropped

into the North Sea. Sam!" Dan's voice was tense with emotion.

"Yes? What is it?"

"Groped about you. Do you see—feel anything familiar—a sense of something you knew once before a long time ago?"

"The only familiar thing I am conscious of at this moment is a badly mussed up anatomy. That seems to be a chronic state with me."

"No, no; I don't mean that. The place, Sam."

"Yes, the time and the place. It is all the same to me. I can't be—I shan't be any worse off if I live to be a million years old. What is it you are trying to tell me?"

"We are not on a Hun battleship, old chum."

"British or French, then?"

"Neither."

"What then?"

"An American battleship. And that isn't all, Sam."

"What?"

"It's our old home, the 'Long Island!'" fairly shouted Lieutenant Davis. "Was there ever anything so wonderful in all the world?" Dan grasped his companion about the waist and danced around on the narrow platform, unmindful of the danger that they were still in, the danger of being thrown overboard in the

heavy lurches the battleship was making. They were at home, and that was all they cared to know at the present moment.

A faint light showed through a transom far below them.

"See, that's the corridor that leads to Captain Farnham's quarters. Won't he be surprised to see us, though. I'll bet they get a start down there when we make our appearance on deck."

"Doesn't that beat the Dutch!" exclaimed the red-headed boy, too full of wonder to say more.

"When you get your sea legs on we will go down. Why, I would know this fighting top anywhere, at any time. Do you remember when we were apprentices how we used to be obliged to go over the top every morning with the rest of the rookies?"

"Of course I remember."

"Those were happy days, Sam, but this is the happiest of all—the happiest we have ever known or probably ever shall know."

"Night, you mean," corrected Hickey. "Yes, I am ready to go below, and the sooner I can pipe down the better I shall be pleased."

The Battleship Boys crept down the swaying military mast. They knew every rung, every step that carried them nearer to the deck. The

mast on which they had been caught was the mainmast at the after end of the high superstructure, next above the gun deck. There was no one there at that time of the night, for this was not a watch station. They dodged around the huge steel potato crate, and the smell of the "spuds" brought with it familiar memories and caused their hearts to swell.

"To the bridge," whispered Dan.

"To the bridge," repeated Sam.

They reached the chart house and peered in. A new navigating officer was there, studying a chart and measuring with his dividers. They did not know him. A moment more and they had stepped to the bridge, the place where they had spent so many hours on duty. There were three officers on the bridge, besides a quartermaster and two orderlies.

"Good evening, gentlemen," greeted Dan Davis, scarcely able to control his voice.

An officer wheeled sharply. It was Lieutenant-Commander Coates.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Don't you know us?" answered Davis.

"I do not. I can't see your faces. Kindly remove the coverings from them." The lieutenant-commander seemed to know the voice, but he could not be certain in the gale that was blowing.

The Battleship Boys realized for the first time that their faces were covered with the bird-man's helmets. They quickly withdrew them. The officer turned a pocket flash lamp on the castaways, and uttered an exclamation.

"Captain Farnham, sir, will you look here?"

Captain Farnham took a few paces forward and peered into the upturned faces of his former young officers.

"Davis!" he cried. "Lieutenant Davis! And Mr. Hickey! In the name of Heaven, where did you gentlemen come from?"

"Oh, we just dropped in," answered Sam carelessly. "Nothing much doing in our line, sir, so we thought we would drop in and make a call on the old home."

"This passes all comprehension. Will you please explain?"

"It is easily explained, sir," spoke up Lieutenant Davis. "We were acting as observation officers on the 'Cromwell.' In a captive balloon, sir. The Huns got in a chance shot and cut the strings that held us to the destroyer. We went adrift and have had quite a trip of it. How glad I am to be back here once more."

"Look here, how long ago was this?"

"Five or six hours I should say."

"You have been wounded. Come into the chart room and I will send for the surgeon."

“Nothing serious, sir. When we struck the fighting top we got banged up somewhat.”

After reaching the chart room the commanding officer pulled down the shades and, turning on the lights in the ceiling, surveyed the young officers wonderingly.

“I told Lieutenant-Commander Dill when he informed me that you were assigned to his ship that he was to be commiserated. I see you gentlemen have not improved any, so far as keeping out of trouble is concerned. Now please tell me the whole story.”

Dan did so, Sam Hickey occasionally putting in a word by way of explanation. Captain Farnham listened attentively, his eyes glistening and the suspicion of a smile on his lips at certain stages of the recital.

“This is the most remarkable story that has come out of the war. It will be smiled at by some who hear it, but if it is you will kindly refer them to me. Frankly, Mr. Hickey, nothing that you two young officers do will surprise or amaze me hereafter. Now tell me what you have been doing on the ‘Cromwell.’ ”

Dan told briefly all that had been accomplished, and of their experiences on the dummy fleet.

“You must tell Coates about that,” declared the commanding officer laughing heartily.

"That is positively the best joke of the war. You young men do not need to be armed. All that you need is a drygoods box with an engine in it and you are ready to go out and meet the dreadnaughts of the enemy. I will warrant that you would find some way of getting the best of them at that. I must inform the admiral of your safety." Calling an orderly the captain dictated a message to the commander of the fleet in those waters.

"May I ask—or rather is it proper for me to ask what you are doing here?" questioned Lieutenant Hickey.

"Making war on the Germans, Mr. Hickey. That is as far as my information goes. Our orders came unexpectedly, while we were under repairs at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. We had to cut the repairs short and hurry over here at full speed. I understand that something like a general fleet movement on the German side is not an improbability in the near future."

"We have had similar intimations," said Lieutenant Hickey nodding.

"There has been considerable trouble in the Mediterranean lately," the captain informed them. "It is possible that later we may go over there, especially if the expected action in the North Sea doesn't come off. I should like to see Lieutenant Dill's face when the admiral

tells him that you picked us up at sea. Instead of the ship picking you up, the contrary was the case."

Acting upon the advice of their former commanding officer, the Battleship Boys went to their old quarters and after bathing, turned in and slept until two bells in the second morning watch.

When they reported on deck Captain Farnham showed them a radio dispatch he had received from Lieutenant-Commander Dill reading, "Better put them in the brig before they get you into difficulties."

All hands had a good laugh over this. Later in the morning they were informed that they would be picked up by the destroyer "Cromwell" at a certain named position, along toward noon.

The "Cromwell" hove in sight and came shouldering down on them at seven bells that forenoon, and a launch from the battleship took the two young lieutenants back to their command, after they had said good-bye to the officers of the "Long Island." They got a rousing welcome on the destroyer, where they were again called upon to tell of their experiences in the runaway balloon.

The information that Dan and Sam had obtained of the German base, was considered by

Lieutenant-Commander Dill to be of such importance that he suggested that the admiral see and talk with them at the earliest opportunity. About the middle of that afternoon they were ordered to go aboard the flagship, which was then bearing down on them. One of the destroyer's launches put them aboard. Admiral Bridges received them in his quarters and with great cordiality.

"Your commanding officers informs me that you have information that you think will be of value to our cause," said the admiral going straight to the subject, with military brevity.

"I am quite certain it will, sir." Dan then related all that they had observed in their two visits to Ostend by the air route.

"Do you think you could put down on paper, in understandable form, a sketch of what you observed, Mr. Davis?"

"I have already done so, sir. Here is the sketch that I made after rising this morning." The admiral examined Dan's contour map with keen interest. After going over every detail of the map several times, he turned to the Battleship Boys.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I consider this, and the further information you have given me, to be of the greatest importance. I will call my writer and I shall ask you to dictate to him

what you have told to me, together with such other facts as you think proper to add to what has been developed in our conversation."

While the writer was transcribing his notes the admiral and his visitors discussed many phases of the war situation. He talked with them more freely than an admiral might ordinarily be expected to do with subordinates of their grades.

The report finished and signed, the admiral read it over. He frowned and read it again. Dan expected that they were about to receive a rebuke.

"What did you have in mind when you made this map?" The admiral bent a keen look on Lieutenant Davis's face.

"The thought occurred to me that the German base there might easily be attacked and captured."

"How? What is your plan?"

"I have not gone that far, sir. What did occur to me was that results might follow the moving of the Stroom Bank buoy. According to the charts, the channel entrance to the harbor is very narrow. The buoy could be moved a few yards at a time on say three successive nights, or it might be moved all at one time. A hundred yards would be sufficient. Do you get the idea, sir?"

"I do, Davis. What then?"

"Have one of the British submarines lying in wait outside and when the first German ship hits the shoal, torpedo her. It seems quite simple."

"It is simple. That probably is why no one else has thought of it. I know that channel. It is a difficult one to pick up and navigate even with all navigation marks in place. After conferring with the British admiral, if he approves, I shall have the buoy moved. As for your report on the harbor, I consider it of so great importance that I shall turn it over to Admiral Brock for such action as he may deem best in the circumstances. I wish to congratulate both you gentlemen on your excellent work. I am proud to have such officers under my command, as perhaps I already have said to you at a previous interview. We need men who have initiative, who can do things, Mr. Davis and Mr. Hickey. You have distinguished yourselves in many ways since coming into the war, and you will soon have opportunity to do so still further."

"I was about to ask, sir, if it would be proper for me to volunteer to move the Stroom Bank buoy?"

"Perfectly proper, and your offer would be accepted were it not for the fact that your ship sails for other waters sometime this evening.

You will have plenty of opportunity to do things where you are going. I wish you good luck, which I know in advance you will have. The Navy Department has the utmost confidence in you, gentlemen. You will understand this more clearly when certain things come to pass. I will now ask you to be the bearers of this packet to your commanding officer. You will request him to acknowledge by wireless. I bid you good-day, gentlemen."

"Dan, do you think Admiral Bridges meant that we were to be promoted soon?" questioned Hickey when they were in the launch on their way back to the destroyer.

"I did not so take it. It is my idea that we are to be assigned to some very important duty; that the assignment will show us the confidence the department has in us and our abilities."

"I wonder where we are going? He said we were to be ordered to some other field. I presume the papers you are carrying are the orders to Mr. Dill to proceed to the new station."

"Probably. Let's not guess. We are naval officers. It is our duty to take and obey orders in a cheerful spirit, no matter how unpleasant or distasteful they may be to us."

Sam nodded his approval of the sentiment.

Half an hour after receiving the papers at

the hands of Lieutenant Davis the wireless of the "Cromwell" began to sputter, then she wheeled out of line, dipped her colors to the flagship and steamed swiftly away.

"We are bound for the Mediterranean, Mr. Davis," the commanding officer informed him. "I have an idea that you will find thrills enough down there to wholly satisfy your love of adventure."

CHAPTER XIX

ON THE ADRIATIC CHASERS

THE Battleship Boys were pleased. They knew that submarines were thick in the Mediterranean and adjacent waters and that many ships were being sunk there. Thus far the allied fleets had not been able to check the menace in those waters.

Later in the day another destroyer detached itself from the North Sea fleet and sailed away for the same station. Late in the evening a third one dashed away on a similar mission.

A few days later the "Cromwell" swung into the blue Mediterranean. It had not been many

months since Dan and Sam had sailed this sea on their way home. Now their mission was a sterner one, and they were in time to convoy some troop ships, which they landed safely at an Italian port.

It was there that the surprise came. The surprise came in the shape of orders handed to them by Lieutenant-Commander Dill. They had carried those very orders from the admiral to their commanding officer the day that they had been summoned before the admiral.

“Lieutenants Dan Davis and Samuel Hickey to command fleet of submarine chasers in the Adriatic. See detailed instructions, orders number 36.

“BRIDGES, *Admiral.*”

In these brief words the Battleship Boys were assigned to an independent command, one that was destined to give them many thrilling experiences and to lead to greater things for them in the United States Navy.

“You will take command at Brindisi, where your flagship and fleet will be assembled by the time we reach there,” Mr. Dill informed them. “We will go over the subject more carefully later on. You will operate in conjunction with the ‘Cromwell,’ subject to general orders from me.”

Brindisi was the mail boat terminal from Egypt to Europe. Across the Mediterranean to and from this port, the fast mail boats used to dart, but now they were engaged in other service relating to the war.

The Battleship Boys were happy boys when the destroyer steamed into Brindisi early one morning. Off behind a breakwater lay the fleet which they were to command for strenuous work on the Adriatic. They could barely see these boats. Here and there a mast sticking up, indicated that a boat was at the end of the stick. Dan and Sam could hardly wait to get a closer view of their fleet, but like good officers they possessed their souls in patience and waited for orders. After luncheon that day Mr. Dill explained briefly what they were expected to do.

“There is,” he said, “a nest of enemy ships up here, Austrian and German. It is from the Adriatic that most of the Austrian submarines operate. The English already are patrolling the waters, and what we have brought this swift chaser fleet of American boats over for, is to take the lead in this work. Of course you will operate in harmony with our allies, remembering that it is the defeat of the enemy that we are seeking, rather than individual or national glory.”

"What part of the Adriatic do we work in?"

"Your own judgment, aided by such information as we have, must answer that. Get them, gentlemen!"

"I suppose their base is Trieste?" said Hickey.

"It is."

"Why not penetrate the base?"

Mr. Dill smiled.

"Too well fortified. Besides that, a cable loaded with mines stretches all the way across the entrance to the harbor. Such a move is not practicable, at least at the present time."

"Have we charts and sea directories aboard?"

"I understand that everything needful has been provided. Suppose we take a launch and go over. Better get your gear together and ship it over with us. There will be no necessity for your returning to the 'Cromwell.' Further, I know that you are eager to get to work."

"We are indeed, sir," answered Sam Hickey. "You see, sir, we are getting stale with this inactivity."

Their first clear view of the fleet of chasers drew exclamations of approval from the Battleship Boys. The chasers were low, snappy looking boats, all except their flagship chaser being

a hundred and ten feet over all. The flagship, the "S 23," measured one hundred and fifty feet over all. This designation excited the mirth of Sam Hickey, but he did not give voice to it until he and Dan were alone.

The "S 23" was of steel construction; her lines were fine, and she possessed a distinction in armament that none of her companions of that class had. This distinction was two small torpedo tubes, with air pump and motors to furnish the air for discharging the torpedoes. There was a tube on the port side and one on the starboard side. In addition to these the armament consisted of one-pounder guns forward, aft and amidships, and depth-bomb equipment.

"Why, she is a regular miniature destroyer," exclaimed Lieutenant Davis after briefly looking over his flagship.

"Yes, she combines the qualities of both chaser and destroyer," agreed Mr. Dill. "She is the latest thing the United States has sent over."

The chasers sat rather too low in the water for comfort in a heavy seaway, but the Battleship Boys saw, with experienced eyes, that the boats of their command were seaworthy and staunch.

All arrangements having been completed, and

with two weeks' supplies on board the little fleet weighed anchors that evening and slipped out from behind the breakwater under cover of darkness, tail lights being the only lights showing aboard any of the boats. With the flagship in the lead they turned their prows northward and set sail for the scene of their operations. After clearing the harbor, Dan and Sam made a thorough inspection of their flagship.

In the middle watch they passed a British cruiser and exchanged identification signals with her, and proceeded on their way. The cruiser reported that she had encountered three enemy submarines, but that the undersea boats had easily eluded her. The position at which the "tin fish" had been sighted was put down on the log of the "S 23." Shortly before daylight, Lieutenant Davis signalled his fleet to spread out according to previous arrangement. It was his plan to sweep the sea back and forth, covering many miles, and by the time the sun came up they were separated with an interval of about seven miles between chasers.

"Smoke to port one point," called a lookout.

Davis and Hickey studied the stranger until finally she was made out to be a Norwegian freighter.

"She is zigzagging!" announced Hickey.

"Full speed ahead," commanded Lieutenant

Davis. The water boiled under the bows of the "S 23," both boys keeping their glasses constantly at their eyes as they searched the seas for the enemy. "From the way he is wearing to starboard I think he is being menaced from port," decided Dan. "Ease off to starboard two points. Signal the freighter not to signal us, nor to make a sign that they know of our presence."

"Going to surprise him, eh?"

"I shall try."

After a little Dan ordered a course steered still further to starboard. As yet they had been unable to sight the enemy that was evidently trying to torpedo the neutral ship.

"I get him!" announced Dan shortly. "Starboard one point." The "S 23" was throwing water high above her bows, flooding the forward deck of the chaser, and making very wet weather of it. "Quartermaster, keep alert. We shall swing soon, and, if he hasn't seen us, we shall give that fellow the surprise of his life—perhaps the last surprise he ever will have."

They finally made the swing and headed obliquely toward the undersea boat. Two periscopes were visible well above the surface of the sea. There was tense excitement aboard the sturdy chaser, and how she did plunge through the seas. Gunners were at the bow

gun, in command of Hickey. Dan stood by the quartermaster, narrowly watching the enemy.

"Do not fire until you are within easy range, unless she should begin to submerge. We must not miss her. She is our prey."

What Lieutenant Davis hoped to do was to get close enough to the undersea boat to be able to run her down, if they failed to sink her with gun fire.

"Signal the freighter to keep out of gun range of us," ordered the youthful commanding officer of the "S 23."

"She is rising, sir," announced Lieutenant Hickey, referring to the U-boat.

"Ready!" commanded Dan.

The top of the conning tower rose dripping from the sea, the Hun commander evidently intending to use the guns of the submarine on the Norwegian, instead of sinking her with a torpedo. Torpedoes are expensive weapons.

The main hatch of the enemy boat was thrown open.

"You may fire when ready," announced Dan calmly.

Hickey had been narrowly watching the enemy. As the main hatch in the conning tower was seen to rise, Lieutenant Hickey opened fire with the bow gun. The first shot struck the conning tower a glancing blow, but it woke them

up. Instead of submerging, as Dan believed they would, the submarine rose still further and gun crews were ordered out and promptly opened fire on the "S 23," but she proved a difficult mark to hit. Dan manoeuvred her with infinite skill. One enemy shot, however, tore a gap in the low deck house, which was quickly patched with canvas to keep the water out.

"Hit! Enemy's bow gun disabled and half the gun crew overboard," announced Lieutenant Davis. "Good work. Give her some more, but take time and make every shot count. Try to knock out the after gun. They are doing the best work with that."

While the battle raged, the Norwegian cargo boat was legging it for safety at full speed. One of the sister chasers was seen tearing down on the scene with a bone in her teeth. Her commanding officer had heard the firing and was coming to the assistance of the flagship.

"Take position astern of me and fire at will," ordered Davis.

In crossing the submarine's bows the second chaser raked her with a heavy fire. This was too much for the undersea boat. Her crew piled in and the main hatch came down.

Dan turned the bow of his boat and drove at

the U-boat with all the speed he could summon.

"Stand by starboard and port with depth bombs. Stern bomb crew stand by also. Await orders."

The periscopes had barely disappeared when the "S 23" ranged alongside. Two depth bombs were released from starboard, and the chaser leaped for safety. She then wheeled almost on a pivot and, dashing back over the spot, let go two bombs from the stern. Columns of water shot into the air. The sea at that point was in a turmoil, and rapidly yellowing with oil, while broken pieces of cabin furniture and other debris rose to the surface.

A small desk-top shot high above the water and fell, turning over and dropped into the sea. Then to the amazement of the crew of the "S 23" the body of a man popped out.

"He is alive!" shouted Dan.

Hickey had made the same discovery, as had his companion.

Sam took a curving leap overboard. A life belt hurled by Dan Davis followed him, but it was too far away to be of help to the Battleship Boy struggling in the heavy seas of the Adriatic.

CHAPTER XX

THE BATTLE OF THE "HORNETS"

DAN quickly manoeuvred his boat to windward of the struggling men in the water, but not daring to get too close for fear of bumping them. Sam was swimming with all his might. A moment more and he had gripped the U-boat man who, in his dazed condition, promptly threw both arms about the Battleship Boy's neck.

Both went under. They came up with Hickey struggling to free himself.

"Hit him!" yelled Dan.

A sailor went overboard, followed by another an instant later.

"No more men overboard!" commanded Dan sternly.

The number two chaser had by this time drawn in and lines were thrown out from her to the red-headed boy.

Hickey finally succeeded in getting one hand free, and planted a short arm blow on the neck of his victim, that put that gentlemen promptly to sleep. By this time the jackies had reached the struggling officer.

"I am all right now," gasped Sam. "Stand by in case I need help."

Hickey swam toward the "S 23," dragging the Hun along until within reach of the lines that Dan had thrown out. Both were then hoisted aboard. After the victim from the U-boat had been hauled to the deck, Sam was pretty well exhausted.

"You have made a good catch," complimented Dan. "This man is an under-lieutenant. We can use him to our advantage. I hope he isn't seriously injured, but how he ever escaped being killed in the explosion is more than I can understand. You had better change your clothes while we are fetching him around."

The under-lieutenant, beyond suffering from shock, was uninjured. He regained consciousness soon after being hauled aboard. There followed an examination in the cabin immediately afterwards. Davis hated to grill his prisoner, the man being very nervous. However, duty demanded that the young naval officer put his prisoner on the rack while the man could be handled.

His name, the American officers learned was von Bechtold. Lieutenant Davis went at him savagely, pressing and laying traps for the prisoner to trip him until von Bechtold finally wept. He then broke down and gave the

Battleship Boys all the information he possessed, information of the most vital moment to the commanding officer of the chaser fleet.

Dan learned how many submarines were operating in those waters; he found out how many ships of war were tied up in the harbor of Trieste, and what the defenses of the harbor were, down to the minutest detail. What he drew from his prisoner, verified and elaborated the data that the intelligence departments of the United States Navy and the British Navy had turned up. Lieutenant Davis learned something else. There was another chaser fleet on the Adriatic. It was an Austrian fleet consisting of twenty or more converted trawlers that acted as patrol boats. Their armament was not equal to that of the American chasers, neither was their speed, but they made up in numbers what they lacked in equipment.

Later in the day von Bechtold awakened much refreshed. He was then told that he would be well treated so long as he behaved himself. Dan decided that, in view of the fact that this was the flagship, a boat on which the German might learn too much, it were better to transfer him to another chaser. This was done just before dark, with instructions to keep the prisoner below decks, except at certain specified

hours, when he was to be given the freedom of the deck for exercise and air.

Lieutenant Davis, later in the day, ordered his fleet to proceed northward. It was his plan to hunt out and attack the enemy patrol fleet. Early that evening he informed the commanding officers of his fleet what he intended to do. His radio messages to them were of course in the navy's secret code.

"Hurrah for the baby U. S. N.," was the answer that reached him out of the air from one of the lively young ensigns of his fleet.

Dan grinned and showed the message to Hickey.

"He may be hurrahing out of the other corner of his mouth before we have finished with this little joy ride of ours," observed Sam grinning broadly. Dan did not reply to the radio message, but appreciated the spirit of it.

The patrol fleet that they were stalking, according to the prisoner, should be picked up a hundred miles further north. It was unsafe waters to get into, but this did not disturb Lieutenant Davis. War has its perils.

The chasers drove ahead at top speed in order to make their objective at the time planned. They made it an hour earlier. Ten enemy patrol boats were sighted about an hour before daylight.

“Fan-shaped formation,” ordered Lieutenant Davis by wireless. “Be cautious and get in as close as possible without discovery. Answer by number that I may know you understand. In rotation.”

The acknowledgment came, each reporting in the order of his number. Half an hour later the flagship opened fire on the leading patrol boat, that was drifting along under reduced speed.

Sam Hickey’s first shot was a hit. Dan was of the opinion that the hit, while well placed, had in it an element of luck, but he knew better than to voice this opinion to Lieutenant Hickey.

The patrol boats fled, firing as they went.

“At them!” commanded Dan. “Not one must be allowed to get away.”

In a short time the trawler patrol boats began to manoeuvre to protect themselves. They soon saw that they were too slow for escape, so they stood their ground and gave battle to their enemy.

It was a snappy battle from the beginning. The chasers being so low in the water, did not offer much of a mark. Then, too, they were darting, zigzagging, as slippery as eels, which made hitting them a most difficult matter.

It fell to Hickey to sink the first trawler. He kept slamming away at its water line until he

had opened up the trawler's hull and let in a flood of water. She went down stern first. In manoeuvring to sink this boat the "S 23" had separated herself by some distance from her own fleet, and in a twinkling she was surrounded by three enemy patrol boats which carried three-inch guns and they were tough customers.

The instant Lieutenant Davis discovered his own predicament he opened fire on the enemy boats with every gun he had. He kept his station by the wheel, from which position he could see everything and keep a firm hand on his chaser, his men and his guns. Hickey was in charge of the guns.

"Open fire on their pilot houses first, Lieutenant Hickey," ordered Dan. His object was to throw the enemy boats into confusion for at least a few moments, which would give him opportunity to carry out his further plans. The "S 23" darted in and out, stinging here and there and keeping her slower antagonists guessing every minute of the time, but despite this she did not keep wholly untouched. A shell passed so near to the young commander that it laid him flat on the deck and killed the quartermaster. Hickey sprang to the wheel until a second quartermaster responded to his command to man the wheel. Sam then lifted Dan to his

feet, bracing him against the wheel post, and doused salt water into his face. The treatment revived Dan almost instantly. The gunners had kept on firing, and off in the distance the rest of the chaser fleet was whanging away. Lieutenant Davis sent a radio message to his commanders to find out what was being done.

"Sunk three of them. Expect to get the rest before we quit."

This cheering news he communicated to his own crew, who answered with a great cheer.

"After gun disabled," called a gunner, referring to the nearest enemy patrol boat. "She is in a bad way, sir."

"Attack the one abeam of her," commanded Lieutenant Davis.

Dan then did a daring thing. With all guns firing and all crews at stations, he sped swiftly past the patrol boat with the disabled gun. "Let go stern depth bomb!" he rasped out. He was so close to the trawler, that both crews thought he surely was going to run her down. The distance separating the two boats was so slight that Hickey declared the paint was scraped from each on the contact side. Instantly on releasing the depth bomb, adjusted to explode near the surface, the chaser, swerved sharply and fled. An explosion that seemed to

lift the stern of the "S 23" out of the water followed almost instantly.

Dan did not wait to see how thorough a job he had done. He knew without looking.

"Give the next one every trick in the box, Sam," shouted Davis.

This third trawler was using his guns on Dan's chaser with good effect. It already had torn the deck out in several places and a shell had gone all the way through the flagship just forward of the steering wheel, but fortunately had not exploded. Lieutenant Davis drove his chaser very much as he had done in the case of the other trawler. In this instance, however, he did not dare go in so close, for one of those three-inch guns would literally blow him out of the water were it to be fired at such close range.

"Torpedo crew, alert!"

They saw his plan now. He was heading in bow on, in position to clear the bow of the trawler provided he held to his course. Instead, when within a thousand yards of the enemy he turned broadside to the trawler.

"Torpedo fire!"

The explosion that resulted lighted up the sea for a few seconds, and the trawler disappeared.

"That other fellow over there is running away," called Lieutenant Hickey.

"He will not go far," replied Davis grimly. Swinging again he started in pursuit, his bow gun firing steadily. Day was dawning when he approached near enough to plant a couple of shells on the deck of the fourth enemy boat. He signalled to the trawler to lay to and surrender.

An acknowledging flag was broken out from the signal halyard. The "S 23" approached cautiously, with a torpedo ready to be fired in case of treachery.

"Officers will come aboard this boat," he bawled through a megaphone.

The transfer was made, the officers of the trawler going over in their own dinghy.

"Lieutenant Hickey and three men will take command of the trawler. Send half the enemy crew aboard this boat. When we pick up the rest of the fleet we will man you with a full complement of Americans."

The rest of the fleet was having a running battle with what was left of the enemy patrol boats. Dan and Hickey joined this running battle. Hickey, on the captured trawler, used the enemy three-inch with good effect. He had raised the American flag after taking possession of the prize and Dan had notified the other commanding officers that she was in command of Lieutenant Hickey, so that they should not fire on her.

An hour later, after Dan and Sam joined the scrimmage, the three remaining trawlers surrendered. The entire enemy trawler fleet had not been engaged, and some of those who were in the distance had slunk away in the darkness. Then after the prisoners had been herded aboard the trawlers and put under guard, the whole fleet went in search of survivors. Few were found, perhaps a dozen in all. Not a chaser had been lost, but two were in a sinking condition when the battle ended. Dan inspected them and directed temporary repairs to be made that would, he thought, carry them through until they could reach a base.

"Six patrol boats have been sunk and four captured; one submarine blown up with depth bomb. Coming in for repairs," was the message that Lieutenant Davis sent to Lieutenant-Commander Dill.

"Great work," was the answer returned.

"Should like to confer with you on arrival."

"Yes," answered the lieutenant-commander.

CHAPTER XXI

DAN'S DARING PLAN

"THE admiral sends his congratulations," announced Lieutenant-Commander Dill when Dan stepped aboard the "Cromwell" late that night. "You will be mentioned in dispatches. You have shown the Hun what Yankee pluck, backed by brains, is capable of doing."

"Thank you, sir. I did not do it all. Lieutenant Hickey is a splendid officer, and so are the individual commanding officers who operated with me, not one of whom was lost. I am very happy over that."

"It was splendid," said the master of the "Cromwell" in a low tone. "What was it that you wished to consult with me about? I am quite certain that it is another Battleship Boys' wild plan. I do not mean to say 'wild' in the sense of impracticable. Your plans are never that. I will confess, though, that they are attended with considerable risk to life and ship."

"You will call this plan not wild, but crazy," Lieutenant Davis made rejoinder. "I have a prisoner on board the 'S 23.' He was the un-

de-lieutenant of the submarine we sunk. I got him after he came up. It was a most remarkable escape. Neither he nor I know how it happened, but he was saved. However, that has nothing to do with what I desire to say. We put him on the rack when he was still nervous and with little control over himself, and pumped him dry. We obtained much valuable information from him, among other things the location and strength of this trawler fleet that we later met and defeated. We quizzed von Bechtold, for that is his name, about the harbor at Trieste. I have, from his description, made a map of the harbor that, while it agrees with the intelligence department's investigations, in the main, furnishes later information."

"This is very interesting, Davis. How many ships did the prisoner state are in the harbor there at the present time?"

"Five Austrian battleships and four cruisers, besides submarines. Von Bechtold could not give me definite figures on the subs. He said so many of them had gone out for duty in the Mediterranean since he left his base that he could not give me the exact number."

"Do you think a destroyer could get in there, Davis?"

"Yes, of course it could get in. Getting out would be the difficult job. I doubt very much if

it could do so. A destroyer presents a pretty big mark. The shore batteries would be likely to finish it with the barrage they could put down."

"How would you get past the mines?"

"As you know they are on a cable, but the cable could be cut."

"Where do the battleships anchor?"

"In the Porto Nuovo. They draw too much water to be berthed in the Porto Vecchio or old harbor."

"Then you do not think it practicable for a destroyer to enter the port?"

"I should hardly put it that way. Of course it is practicable, but I think fully as much damage can be done without sacrificing so much property and so many lives."

Lieutenant-Commander Dill laughed.

"Of course you have a plan. I knew there was a desperate scheme in the back of your head when you asked for a conference. Out with it, Davis."

"I wish to ask permission to go in there and try to do the enemy some damage," answered Dan simply.

"To penetrate the harbor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give me the outlines of the plan you propose to follow."

"On a dark and stormy night," began Dan.

He stopped and grinned. "It sounds very dramatic, but I mean it. I shall have to have the support of a destroyer outside, and with one of the chasers I can get close to the harbor, perhaps all the way in. Two parties should work at cutting the cable at the same time to save time and effort. A small boat could then go in and do the deed."

"Of course you understand that the first hostile move you make will bring down a killing fire on you and your boat?"

"That is to be expected, sir."

"Hm-m-m. It is a daring scheme, and would surely bring its reward to you, Lieutenant."

"I am not thinking of that, sir. I think you know that I am not looking for reward."

"I know that, Davis. I understand you perfectly. Your country first."

"Yes, sir."

"You believe von Bechtold has told you the truth?"

"Positive of it, sir."

"How about getting out after you have done your work?"

"There are two ways. Either a small launch could come in when needed, or if needed, or we could take our chances in a small boat. There being no reason for concealment after we have done our work, we could fire rocket signals,

such signals as may be agreed upon in advance, and then we can be picked up."

"It seems worth while to work the plan out. Yes, go ahead and do so. I will, in the meantime, think it over most carefully. What have you done with your prisoners?"

"They are on board one of the captured trawlers. I should like to get them off my hands as soon as possible, as they are a big responsibility. Being in port now we have to keep them below decks all the time, and it is very hard on them."

"I will see the officials ashore to-night and arrange for the transfer of the prisoners," said Mr. Dill. "Your crews are satisfactory?"

"No man could ask for better or more loyal ones," replied Dan with enthusiasm.

"I should like to talk with this man von Bechtold. Suppose we go over in the 'Cromwell's' launch."

"Very good, sir. I have a launch alongside. If you will go over in that it will save you the bother of putting one over. Mine can bring you back whenever you are ready."

To this Mr. Dill gave assent and, with Dan Davis, was soon on his way to the berth assigned to the Adriatic chasers. Dan first took him aboard "S 23" to show him how badly it had been damaged in the battle.

"It is a wonder any man came through alive," marveled the officer.

The launch soon brought the German officer and an armed jackie to the "S 23" and the prisoner was taken before Lieutenant-Commander Dill in the cabin of the chaser. The German naval officer came to a stiff salute, which Lieutenant-Commander Dill and Lieutenant Davis answered punctiliously.

"Lieutenant Davis has related to me a certain conversation had with you the day you were captured. Have you anything to add to what you then said to him?"

"Nothing. The lieutenant took advantage of my condition following the loss of the undersea boat, to extract certain information from me. However, I have no complaint to make. It is war. I am the one who made a mistake by speaking too freely. However, I stand by it, sir."

"How closely guarded is the entrance to the harbor at Trieste?" questioned Mr. Dill.

"You will pardon me, sir, if I decline to answer further."

"You are a German. While pretending to love Austria you and your rulers despise her. You are simply using her, some day to swallow her neck and crop. We are desirous of getting information as to certain conditions in the har-

bor of Trieste, an Austrian harbor and where Austrian ships are stationed."

"It is the same thing—all for the Fatherland. I shall say nothing."

"Davis, lock this man up here under guard to-night. If by morning he is not ready to talk we will try some other method. That is all." The guard was placed over the German naval officer and he was left alone to think over his situation. "He verified his conversation with you. Of course I do not question the correctness of your account of the interview, but I did wish to gain a little further information."

"On what phase of it, sir?"

"I don't know, Davis," answered the lieutenant commander laughing. "I had an idea that he might let something slip that would be of use to us in making our plans."

"No, sir; he is corked up for good, if I know the temperament. If you think best I will try to worm more out of him to-morrow morning."

"No, no; never mind. I think we have sufficient to guide us. We know it to be true because of what we have learned from the intelligence departments of the two navies. You will hear from me some time to-morrow. In the meantime I shall arrange for the transfer of the prisoners to the Italian authorities. The Gov-

ernment will direct the admiral what to do with them. We shall be rid of responsibility for them as soon as we turn them over. Where is Lieutenant Hickey?"

"He is making a survey of the chasers that were in action so we can make a report to you in the morning."

Lieutenant-Commander Dill nodded approvingly.

"I wish to say that you and Mr. Hickey are the most efficient young officers I have ever known. Your rise in the service should be rapid."

"Thank you, sir."

Dan, after the departure of his superior, hailed a power dinghy from one of the other chasers and went in search of Lieutenant Hickey, whom he found covered with grease, making repairs to a motor.

"Come, Sam, it is time to pipe down," called Dan cheerfully. "I have had a talk with Mr. Dill. He thinks favorably of our plan with regard to Trieste."

"He didn't express a wish to join our suicide club, did he?" inquired Hickey without looking up.

"No, but he would like to. Mr. Dill is going to consider the outline I have given him of what we hope to be permitted to try. He is going to

give us a definite answer on it to-morrow. I shouldn't be surprised if he asked higher up to decide it for him."

"We don't care who decides it so long as we get our chance."

Lieutenant Davis nodded and ordered Hickey to suspend work until the next day. With the big plan in mind they piped down and went to sleep with hardly the loss of a minute. To-morrow would take care of itself.

CHAPTER XXII

TAKING THEIR TOLL

LIEUTENANT VON BECHTOLD was even less communicative next morning than he had been on the previous evening. About ten o'clock in the morning he was removed by the Italian authorities and, at the request of Lieutenant-Commander Dill, was kept in solitary confinement that he might not convey to others any suspicion he might have as to the plans of the United States commander of the chaser fleet.

Work of repair was begun early in the morning on the little boats of the chaser fleet. It

was under full headway under the direction of the Battleship Boys when a summons came to report on board the "Cromwell." Putting on their uniforms, the two young lieutenants boarded their power dinghy and soon were aboard the destroyer.

"Good morning, gentlemen," greeted Mr. Dill. "How soon can you have your boats ready to go to sea?"

"It will take a week to do the work properly. If there is urgent need for them we can sail at once."

"That was what I looked for you to say," answered the naval officer with a smile. "I am not in such great haste as that. I merely wished to know. Any further information from your U-boat prisoner?"

"None at all, sir. We shall get nothing more from him. Besides, the Italians have removed him on your request."

"Yes, I know. I suppose you are eager to know my decision in the matter discussed by us last evening?" The lieutenant-commander's eyes twinkled.

"Naturally we are, sir," spoke up Sam Hickey. "You see we have formed what we are pleased to call our 'Suicide Club' and we are eager to hold our first meeting up near Trieste."

Mr. Dill laughed heartily. "You have chosen an apt name. It is all that the name implies. Gentlemen, you may go ahead with your plans and make the attempt. Before you sail north, however, I shall desire to have you lay before me the whole scheme."

"Yes, sir," agreed Lieutenant Davis.

"Now that you have permission to go ahead, you will sail when?" asked the lieutenant-commander.

"Three days hence, sir. For various reasons I do not wish to delay putting this thing through."

"Trying to put it through," corrected Mr. Dill. "The chances against its success are about a million to one. The government's chances of losing two very valuable officers are about in the same proportion in the other direction. That's all for to-day." He knew the boys were eager to lose no time in making their preparations for their great attack on the enemy.

Dan and Sam shook hands on their way to the anchorage of the chasers.

"Do you suppose you can get a canoe for me in Brindisi?" asked Lieutenant Davis.

"Not going canoeing, are you?" retorted Sam.

"Yes. I wish to take one along with me. Make a try to-day. I must have one."

“Won’t a gondola do?”

“You find that canoe. Later on I will explain what I wish to do with it. I shall have to have a small motor boat, too. However, I think perhaps our power dinghy will answer the purpose, but the motor must be muffled down and the exhaust piped out under water. The motor must be boxed so that not so much as a click will be audible outside the boat.”

Sam went away and was gone nearly half a day. When he returned to the “S 23” he brought with him a bright red canoe, which he trailed behind a motor launch. There were smiles aboard the “S 23” when Lieutenant Hickey came alongside and ordered the canoe hauled aboard and immediately covered so that it might be hidden from inquisitive eyes. Dan ordered the canoe painted to correspond with the color of the chaser—war color—immediately after dark.

That night the little fleet slipped out of the harbor and turned northward. Not a ship was encountered during the night run, but in the early morning the familiar hail, “Periscope off the starboard bow!” aroused every man on the “S 23.” Lieutenant Davis ordered the others of the fleet to fall in and follow the flagship.

The submarine dived, whereupon the fleet

dashed in and dropped depth bombs. Each chaser following the destroyer had sailed off to starboard sufficiently far to avoid being lifted out of the water by the discharge of the depth bombs, and in this position they sped along in ever widening circles.

"Oil rising off the port quarter," announced a lookout.

"Cease firing," signalled Lieutenant Davis. The fleet slowed down and circled about the tell-tale patch of oil. Wreckage began to come up, but no bodies.

"Proceed on former course," signalled the flagship, and the fleet sailed away.

Twice more than day submarines were sighted and attacked. One plainly was destroyed; the second they believed had been downed, but were not wholly certain of it. On the morning of this day, according to arrangement with Lieutenant Davis, the "Cromwell" sailed to join the chaser fleet. Early on the third evening the chaser fleet approached their objective. The "S 23," under slow speed, crept up to reconnoiter, the rest of the fleet remaining back some miles on patrol for home-coming enemy ships. Dan went in close enough to pick up the lights of the city of Trieste, but the harbor was in darkness and he could make out little of it, though from familiarity with the



First Meeting of the Suicide Club.

maps of the place he was able to fix in his mind the locations of all the landmarks.

The night was very dark, but the stars were out, and their presence seemed rather to intensify the blackness of the night than to lessen it. Lieutenant Davis believed conditions were right for a close reconnoissance. He consulted with Lieutenant Hickey and then decided to make the attempt. The sea was calm, though the usual swell was on.

Drawing in to within about a mile and a half of the harbor, Lieutenant Davis turned the chaser over to his chief quartermaster, a capable and trustworthy fellow who could navigate and handle the boat fully as well as the Battleship Boys themselves.

"Remember, Carey, you are not to go in closer unless you get a rocket, in which event you are to dash in, but no further than the line indicated on this chart. You will be blown up if you go further. Watch for signals from our flashlight. Put over the power dinghy and the canoe. Keep your position here and stand ready to give me your position with one short flash from your lamp should I ask for it."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The dinghy and the canoe were put over from the lee rail. Hickey took charge of the motors, Dan taking his position in the bow of the

dinghy. The canoe was trailed behind. A moment more and the little boat had been swallowed up in the darkness.

“Steer for the outer end of the breakwater,” suggested Hickey.

After approaching as near as Dan deemed advisable he ordered Sam to shut down and draw the canoe alongside. Dan cautiously crawled into the cranky canoe and without a word began shooting the frail boat ahead over the swells with a confidence that betokened entire familiarity with this type of boat. As he neared the great breakwater Dan proceeded with still more caution. He was nearing the cable on which the deadly mines were strung, and he also had reason to believe that guards were patrolling the breakwater. On beyond, the lights of the city of Trieste shone brilliantly. They were in curved tiers and reminded him of an amphitheater with the harbor as the base of it. The Fanale Marittimo light at the end of the Mole St. Teresa was not lighted, nor did he expect to find it lighted. This lighthouse, standing one hundred and eight feet high, may be seen in clear weather, many miles at sea, but it had not been lighted since the war began.

The canoe, drawing but a few inches of water, Lieutenant Davis believed, would easily clear the mines. Part of his plan, however, was to

locate the mine cable. This he did by trailing a fish line with a large hook on the end of it, the line weighted just enough to cause it to sink about a fathom—six feet—below the surface.

A tug at the line and Dan stopped. He felt of the line cautiously, and knew that he had hooked the cable. It was just at the end of the breakwater. The harbor entrance was not more than two hundred feet wide, and he found that the mine cable was in the exact position indicated on his chart, fully verifying what Lieutenant von Bechtold had told him.

Dan was well over the cable now, but he did not relax his caution. There might be other mines, and he had learned to take nothing for granted in this modern warfare.

Suddenly Dan uttered an exclamation under his breath. A broad beam of light, from somewhere on shore shot into the air. He drove his canoe close up against the concrete wall and prepared himself for what he felt certain was coming.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

THE searchlight from the land slowly swept the harbor, then rested briefly on the narrow entrance to it. Dan had flattened himself in the boat and lay there in the glare of light. The beam moved to another point and finally went out.

The ships in the harbor, especially the warships, Lieutenant Davis located more by intuition than by sight, but before he turned back he had definitely fixed the position of each in his mind. The next thing was to get back to his dinghy. To accomplish this he proceeded with the same caution that he had employed in entering the harbor, still continuing his observations. Dan was greatly pleased at finding iron ladders, regular sea-ladders, built into the concrete of the breakwater. One of these he climbed and, holding the painter of his canoe twisted about one wrist, he peered over the top of the wall and discovered a sentry standing leaning on his gun within ten feet of him. The sentry was gazing out to sea. Lieutenant Davis

hung there breathless, fearing that the man had discovered something out there on the sea that might defeat all of the Yankee officer's future plans. To his relief, the sentry soon resumed his slow march up and down the breakwater. Dan slid down the sea-ladder, into his canoe and began paddling for the sea. Davis had some difficulty in picking up Hickey, but finally the dinghy suddenly loomed in front of him.

"Shear off, you lubber!" called Dan as loudly as he dared, at the same time throwing the bow of the canoe to starboard. "You nearly ran me down."

"Well, I am glad to see you back. Do you know you have been gone three hours? Most trying experience I've ever had. I began to think that they had got you. What luck?"

"The best. I have found the cable and I have fixed the positions of the important ships in the harbor and—did you see them using the searchlight?"

"Yes, I did, and it nearly gave me heart disease. I thought surely they had discovered you. When shall you make the try, to-night?"

"No; not until weather conditions are more favorable, and I wish to go in a few more times to learn the enemy's habits."

They picked up their flagship an hour later,

then the entire fleet put out to sea. Long before daylight they were far out of sight of land, headed toward Venice, the little fleet well scattered so as not to attract attention in the event of their being sighted by hostile craft.

The next night Lieutenant Davis, once more at sea before Trieste, went through the same program at the same hour. So did the enemy, including the using of the searchlight. This, it developed, was the regular nightly performance. Again Dan returned safely. The third night he followed the same plan, and with results the same. He felt that he was now ready for the great adventure. All that was needed was the proper weather setting. On the following day, by previous arrangement, he picked up the "Cromwell" at sea about a hundred miles from Trieste, and went aboard for a conference with the commanding officer. Mr. Dill considered the final plans that Davis had made with great care.

"You have done well, Davis. It is wonderful what you have accomplished. But it is a desperate undertaking. You understand that, do you not?"

"Of course, sir, but I have no fears."

"I am well aware of that. You wish to make the attempt to-night?"

"Yes, sir. It looks like rain, and that is the

one thing needful, but a gale would make it more difficult, seeing that we shall have to use the small boats."

"Very good. You will signal me when you are ready to go in. We will constantly keep within signalling distance."

Dan returned to his flag ship and piped down for a long sleep. He wished his nerves to be steady on that night of all nights. The least slip on his part and he might not only sacrifice his own life, but those of his companions as well.

A drizzling rain set in shortly after sundown, which soon increased to a heavy downpour. The greatest uncertainty in Lieutenant Davis's mind now was whether weather conditions would cause the enemy to exert greater vigilance. However, he was determined to go through with his plan in any event.

The hour for embarking for the great undertaking approached. The "S 23" drew up closer to the harbor than before, for visibility was low. The power dinghy, with muffled exhaust and boxed motors, put out from the chaser with two life boats in tow, the name of the ship to which the boats belonged having been painted out. Nearing the pierhead, four men, with Lieutenant Hickey in command, rowed in. Hickey climbed a sea-ladder to the top of the

breakwater, carrying a halyard with a large loop at one end, and carefully placed the loop in the middle of the walk on the top of the concrete wall. He then crept back to the ladder holding the free end of the halyard in his hands. There he waited with the patience of an Indian. A sentry finally came pacing slowly along, and stepped fairly into the center of the loop.

Sam gave the rope a quick jerk, and the sentry fell down with a crash. Hickey was upon him almost instantly. One blow from the Battleship Boy's fist put the Austrian to sleep. The next thing was to dispose of the man. This Sam did in the simplest way possible—by dropping him overboard. The soldier was rescued by the men in the lifeboat and bound hand and foot after he had been restored to consciousness.

The second sentry failing to meet his companion at the end of the post, came along down the breakwater, challenging softly. Lieutenant Hickey got him in the same way. The third he missed, but ere the fellow had had time to react and discover that a trap had been laid for him, the red-headed boy had pounced upon him.

The struggle was brief, the element of surprise going a long way toward finishing up the sentry. He too was dropped overboard.

Hickey's fighting blood was now up. He glanced this way and that in search of other victims, but none appeared. It was with reluctance that he turned to carry out the further plans made for him by Lieutenant Dan Davis. Along the breakwater were several little concrete pagodas in which the sentries might take shelter. Sam secreted himself in one of these, near where he had captured the three sentries, and there he waited with all the patience he could summon. An hour passed. Finally his listening ears caught the sound of footsteps. Sam was on the alert on the instant. A man passed him, apparently an officer, but Hickey could not be certain in the darkness.

After a time the officer returned. He was walking more rapidly now. The newcomer strode directly to the pagoda in which Sam was secreted, and threw open the door. A right hand punch, delivered in Sam Hickey's best form, smote him squarely on the point of the jaw. The officer, for such he proved to be, went down in a heap. Hickey dragged him to the edge of the wall.

"Stand clear below. Here's another," he hailed softly.

"Aye, aye, sir."

Splash!

"Got him, sir," came a low-voiced call after

a brief interval, whereupon Hickey grunted and returned to his cover. But no more victims came his way. In the meantime Lieutenant Davis and his crews were sawing away at the mine cable out at the entrance to the harbor. Cutting the cable proved to be a more difficult task than Dan had anticipated, but at last the work was completed. He waited until the men on the other side of the channel had finished their work and, at a given signal, both ends were let go at the same instant. Then followed a few moments of tense waiting.

What if the sinking mines should explode when they touched bottom? Lieutenant Davis believed, however, that the buoyancy of the water would serve to let the deadly mines down softly. This proved to be the case, and every man concerned in these preparations, breathed more freely.

Lieutenant Hickey had already given the all clear signal with his pocket flash lamp, and now Dan flashed the signal for the "S 23" to approach. The searchlight back of the city of Trieste had already done its nightly duty and gone to sleep. The downpour of rain increased in intensity.

Twenty minutes later the chaser flagship slipped into the narrow channel barely under steerageway. A life boat and the dinghy were

taken in tow, and Dan addressed the dozen men that composed his crew for this great adventure.

"Men," said he, "some of us, in all probability, will not come out of this. Should this boat be sunk you can take to the life boat. The dinghy we will keep on the lee side. Its purpose is to pick up survivors that may be left in the water. The life boat, too, will be adrift. I wish every man to put on a life belt now. I do not think it necessary to warn you that every man is expected to keep his head. This is a desperate undertaking, and none of us may come out alive, so make up your minds to this and go in determined to do the enemy all the damage you possibly can before he gets you. If Lieutenant Hickey takes any prisoners, you must do your best to save them. Otherwise set them adrift if you have time. Here come our other boats now."

"Immediately upon starting from here you will all take your stations and keep alert. There must be no conversation in any circumstances. In the event of both your superior officers being incapacitated, the quartermaster, if we succeed, will fire a red rocket indicating that the work is completed so far as it can be done. Lieutenant Hickey," called down Dan, "is everything clear?"

"Yes, sir. Three sentries and an officer taken. No casualties."

"Good. Send them back to our fleet in the life boat. Step lively, men. Slow speed ahead. Silence, now!"

The "S 23" and her brave crew drifted slowly into the harbor, her clean bows making scarcely a ripple on the waters of Porto Nuovo. The Battleship Boys were on the very edge of their great adventure now.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

THE sound of the rain beating on the steel deck of the chaser was the only sound heard. A circle of lights on the Piazza Grande shone faintly through the fog and rain, and by the same sign the boys were able to trace the windings of the Corso, the Fifth Avenue of Trieste.

"Port a little," whispered Lieutenant Davis in the ear of his quartermaster. "Steady."

Sam Hickey, now clad in a bathing suit and sweater, was stepping quietly from crew to crew giving final directions. Now and then he

turned to observe a light moving on a mole. These moles that lined the land side of the harbor were cement docks at which ships landed, and there were many of them in both the old and new harbors. Night work was going on on some of them, but the lights there were dim.

Lieutenant Davis had to exercise great care that his flagship did not get between the shore lights and the war ships he was after. He knew the location of every one of them, thanks to his painstaking preparation for this raid. His first objective was a huge Austrian battleship. Subdued lights shone in her outside cabins, and strains of music floated through the mist.

"Is that the one?" whispered the red-headed boy.

"Yes. Ready now."

Hickey took charge of the torpedo tube. The chaser had come to a full stop. Silence reigned over all, but the silence was suddenly broken by the muffled report of a discharged torpedo, one of the red-headed torpedoes used for short range work, especially from smaller boats. Though small they are all powerful.

"One quarter ahead," commanded Lieutenant Davis calmly. He was moving on to the next victim the instant after the torpedo had left his tube.

Then came an explosion that fairly lifted the

"S 23" out of the water. Nearly every man on the deck of the chaser, who was not holding fast was hurled flat. A great burst of flame lighted up the harbor and the chaser responsible for all this destruction. The chaser stood out boldly.

"Stand by, every man of you!" cried Lieutenant Davis. "The cruiser next, Mr. Hickey." Sam manned the tube and let drive a torpedo at a large cruiser tied up at the end of a short mole. The cruiser blew up with fully as terrific a report as had the battleship.

"Full speed ahead," ordered the Yankee naval officer. "Regard speed, when aiming, Mr. Hickey."

"Aye, aye, sir." They could talk out loud now. There was no longer need for secrecy.

The chaser was darting this way and that, Sam Hickey letting go a torpedo at every opportunity. Searchlights were now sweeping the harbor. Guns above the city tried to reach the little boat that was doing all this damage, but their gunners were unable to depress them sufficiently to hit the "S 23."

Suddenly an enemy destroyer commander collected his wits sufficiently to open up on them with his guns, but not having a head of steam on he could not go in pursuit. The harbor was by now a scene of utter confusion. Ships were exploding, rockets were being fired into the air,

guns were whanging away, and now and then above the din, screams and cries were heard ashore, and in the water to the right and to the left of them.

A terrific crash aft on the chaser told Dan that their luck had changed. The little craft had been badly hit by a three-inch shell, but she did not lose headway.

"Two men done for," announced Hickey. "One more well-placed shot will settle us."

One more did come almost before the words had left his lips. It hit the chaser forward. Dan fired a red rocket, followed by two green ones, meaning in the prearranged code, "we are mortally hit." He had no need to tell those watchful eyes out there at sea that the raid had been successful, for the men on the American destroyer had heard and seen.

"Lieutenant Davis surely is tearing the place up by the roots," breathed Lieutenant-Commander Dill. "I fear he never will get out of that hole."

"The ship is settling, sir," announced Dan's orderly. The motors had stopped, their engineer lying dead beside them.

"To the boats," shouted Lieutenant Davis. "Take your wounded men with you." The dinghy had escaped unscathed, but there was not room in her for all. Dan ordered the quar-

termaster to take command of the dinghy and get out with the crew as fast as possible. Sam Hickey had hauled the life boat alongside, and into this the two young officers sprang and pulled for the big breakwater. They were now out far enough for the fire of the enemy to reach them. The guns on the heights had put down a barrage on the channel entrance through which it did not seem possible any boat could live, but before the barrage started the swiftly moving little dinghy had dashed through and was out in the open roadstead. Not so with Dan and Sam. They found themselves on the wrong side of this rain of shells that were exploding with deafening reports.

The Battleship Boys reached the breakwater in safety and nosed along by the side of it until they came to a sea-ladder. Up this they shinned, leaving their boat in the water. They had no further use for it now.

"Sam, we must go through it," Dan shouted in the ear of his companion.

"We can try," answered the red-headed boy.

Dan ordered Sam to crouch down and watch for a lull in the firing, at the same time keeping a wary eye out to the rear of them, toward the shore end. Just then, from some, to them, unknown cause, another ship in the harbor exploded. They reasoned that it must have been

the indirect result of some of their own work. The flash revealed to them something else. A squad of soldiers were racing along the breakwater toward the two young officers, but Dan was confident that the soldiers had not yet discovered them.

“We must run for it, barrage or no barrage, Sam. Ready, go!”

They dashed ahead toward the outer end of the breakwater at full speed, but all at once Sam plunged forward on his face and lay still. Dan, at the same time, felt a stinging sensation in his left shoulder and knew that he too had been hit.

Hickey lay motionless where he had fallen. There was no time for Dan to find out whether his companion was dead or alive. He swung Sam over his shoulder and, bending far forward, ran with all his might for the end of the breakwater. Every second, he thought, would end his race, for his limbs were growing weaker and his breath was coming short.

Though Dan was unaware of the fact, it was the loss of blood from his wound that was responsible, in large part, for his weakness. He gained the end of the breakwater. Reaching for his pocket flashlight to signal for assistance, he found that he had lost it.

“Unless they are on the job, we are goners!”

he gasped. An instant's hesitation, the shifting of his burden to his arms, then Dan plunged into the rolling sea with his unconscious companion. Both wore life belts, which lightened his burden once they had struck the water.

Just as he was about to leap over a beam from the searchlight on the shore had, for a few brief seconds, brought them out into bold relief. Davis struck out with one arm, the one in which he had been wounded, with no definite idea of where he was going, except that he must get as far away from that breakwater as possible, and in the very shortest possible time.

Lieutenant Davis felt himself getting weaker with the moments. Consciousness left him with a suddenness that gave him no time to think, and his body relaxed out in the water.

When Dan regained his senses, he found himself in the sick bay of a ship. He was very weak and his voice seemed to have left him. He closed his eyes wearily. After a time he opened them again, and his gaze rested on the face of the surgeon of the "Cromwell."

"How did I get here?" demanded Dan raising himself, then sinking back weakly.

"Do not excite yourself. You were picked up by the 'Cromwell's' launch. Be quiet or you will wake Lieutenant Hickey." The surgeon pointed to another cot on which Dan could

faintly see the red hair of his companion protruding through between the bandages with which his head was swathed.

“Is—is—is Sam——”

“Like yourself, he is going to be all right. A shell splinter tore a hole in his scalp and downed him. A bullet, that evidently was fired at you after you went into the water, performed about the same service for you. The commanding officer saw you when the enemy played the searchlight on you. He had been waiting for your signal all the time. He was not positive that it was you until the quartermaster came back with the dinghy and told him you and Lieutenant Hickey had remained behind because there was not room for all in the power boat. That was a very fine thing to do, Lieutenant. Drink this and you will soon be asleep. As near as we have been able to learn from what Mr. Hickey has told us, you did a pretty thorough job in there. Their destroyers are out looking for us.”

“Where is my fleet?”

“Well on their way to their base, where Mr. Dill ordered them to proceed.”

When Dan next awakened the morning light was flooding the sick bay. Hickey lay blinking at him with large, weary eyes.

“Well, Dynamite, they nearly got us that

time, didn't they?"

"Sam!" breathed Dan, his voice full of feeling.

"Yes, the same old Sam with the same old complaint—damaged anatomy. I reckon we shall both spend a few days in a hospital. I _____,"

At this juncture Lieutenant-Commander Dill stepped into the sick bay. His face, grave when he entered, lighted up when he saw that the Battleship Boys were fully awake and talking. Each struggled up to give him a weak salute.

"Never mind the salutes, boys. I came down here intending to compliment you, but somehow words fail me. It was splendid! It was the most brilliant feat that has been performed since the war began, and brings added luster to the American Navy. I have reported to our base by radio. You will hear from it later, but now we shall have to land you and place you in a hospital."

The two wounded officers were removed from the ship on the following morning and taken to a naval base where they were placed in a hospital. They remained there a week, following which they were ordered to proceed to the American base in England and report to the admiral.

This they did, and one morning a few days later were received by their commander in chief. The admiral embraced them both.

“Gentlemen, you have fulfilled all the traditions of our service. The Navy Department recognizes your services as of a high order, and in view of what you have done I am directed to inform you that Lieutenant Daniel Davis is raised to the grade of Lieutenant-Commander; Lieutenant Samuel Hickey to be promoted to the grade of Senior Lieutenant. I congratulate each of you. You are both young to receive such promotion, but you have earned it and more. I see ahead of you a long and brilliant career. Do in the future as you have done in the past, always holding yourselves to the same high standard that you have set for your guidance, and success and honor will be yours. You will now take thirty days’ leave. You have had quite a variety of special service, and I believe you are to have still further service of a detached nature. However, you will receive your orders some time between now and the first of next month. That is all, except that I wish to congratulate you most heartily. Good-bye, gentlemen.”

“Thirty days and nowhere to go,” mourned Hickey after they had left the admiral.

“I don’t know where you are going to spend

your vacation, but I am going to Paris. First, I propose to have two and a half bars put on my shoulders. You see I am a lieutenant-commander now."

"And I a lieutenant, senior grade. Isn't that fine? I think, old shipmate, that you and I can now cut quite a figure in Paris. How well I remember the first time we went there, when we were 'touched' for all we had in our pockets, and got into difficulties faster than we could get out of them. I hope nothing of the sort comes our way this time."

It proved to be a most interesting vacation. While in France they visited the battle front and saw something of the operations of the Allied armies, and the desperate warfare waged by the Huns on land.

However, their vacation soon drew to a close—all too soon to suit Dan and Sam, but they returned to their naval base full of eagerness to take up the new duties and with a care-free willingness to take what came and make the best of it. In a following volume, entitled "THE BATTLESHIP BOYS ON SKY PATROL; Or, Fighting the Hun from Above the Clouds," will be related the further thrilling experiences of Dan and Sam in the great world war.

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